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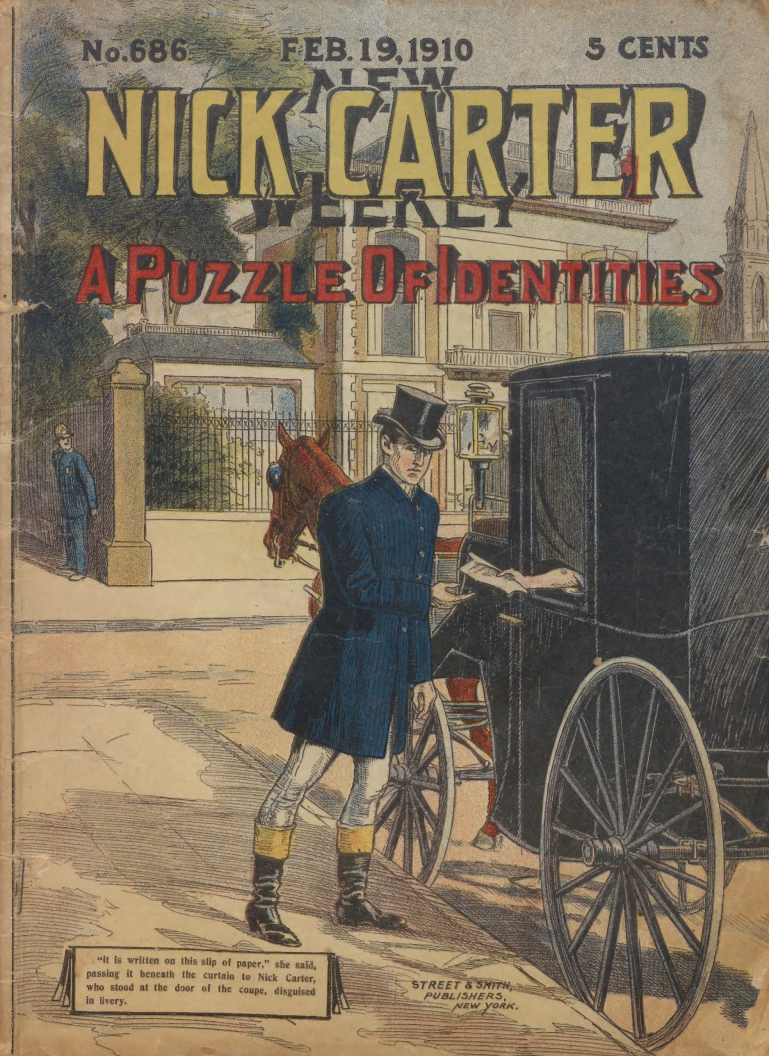
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

A PUZZLE OF IDENTITIES



"It is written on this slip of paper," she said, passing it beneath the curtain to Nick Carter, who stood at the door of the coupe, disguised in livery.

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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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A Puzzle of Identities;

OR,

Nick Carter Solving a Strange Problem.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE CLIENT.

"There is a person in the reception room to see you, sir," said Joseph, pausing at the threshold of the study door.

Nick Carter raised his eyes from the letter he had been reading, and smiled. It was rarely that Joseph expressed himself in precisely that manner, and when he did so, it had its significance, especially to his master, who knew and understood every characteristic of the faithful fellow who had served him so long a time.

"A person, eh?" replied the detective. "What sort of a person, Joseph?"

"I couldn't exactly say as to that, sir," replied Joseph. "It is evident that he has been a gentleman at some time in the past—but he seems rather far removed from it now."

"What does he want? Did he say?"

"No, sir; only that he wished to see you personally, and he begged me to secure him an interview, if possible."

"I will see him, of course," said the detective, rising.

When, in a few moments, he entered the reception room, the man whom Joseph had announced turned from the window through which he had been gazing out upon the street—or, rather, the avenue—and the detective found himself confronted by an unshaven, unshorn, pallid creature, who might have been forty, but who, at that moment, looked to be sixty years of age. His clothing, much worn and badly soiled and wrinkled, hung loosely upon his emaciated figure: a battered and broken derby hat rested upon a chair beside where he stood. His shoes alone fitted him, and they seemed almost new. He wore no collar, and the bosom of his shirt was considerably soiled—but his face and hands were scrupulously clean and his hair was neatly brushed, notwithstanding its length.

"Won't you be seated?" said the detective, in a kindly tone. He also saw the evidences of gentility that Joseph had discovered.

"Thank you, Mr. Carter," the man responded, in a soft, clear tone that was remarkably modulated. It was unquestionably the voice and the enunciation of gentility, and Nick caught himself wondering where he had heard that voice before. "I hope I am not

intruding upon your time; but—I did wish to see you very much indeed."

"Not at all. What can I do for you? Or, first, who are you?"

A wan smile flickered for an instant upon the bloodless lips of the stranger, and the suggestion of a gleam shone for a second in his lacklustre eyes.

"If I should begin by telling you who I am," he said, "you would begin—as others have done—by being incredulous, and you would conclude by believing me to be insane; and so, if you will permit, I will relate my story first and come to the question of identity later."

Nick Carter shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please," he said.

"I should start, sir, by informing you that I am, at the moment, penniless. I have no money to offer you for the time you may, perhaps, waste upon me; but——"

The detective waved his right hand by way of interruption.

"Tell me what it is that you desire to consult me about," he said; and the man, after a moment of hesitation, replied:

"Mr. Carter, yesterday morning I was discharged from one of the city hospitals, cured—at least that is what I was told. I am conscious of having been an inmate there only three days; but I was assured that I had been under treatment there for six months, and that my case was a most interesting one."

"You mean——"

"I mean that I have no recollection of having gone there; that I confidently expected, when I issued from the hospital yesterday morning, to find snow upon the ground, and that in reality I walked out of it into the midst of June."

The detective nodded; he was beginning to understand.

"You will observe," the stranger continued, "that I am wearing a winter suit of clothing. My underwear is the same, and is in good condition. In a word, I know that I am dressed as I was when I was last conscious of myself—save only that a fur-lined coat should have been returned to me with the other garments."

"Well? Go on, please."

"I was told that no fur coat was found with me when I was taken to the hospital; that my pockets contained absolutely nothing; that there has been no way of identifying me—not even a laundry mark; but that is explainable."

"How?"

"I recall perfectly that when I dressed, in the morning of the day when I left my house, I put on new linen and new underclothing, which had not yet been sent to any laundry."

"Then you must remember who you are," said the detective.

"I do, sir, perfectly well; but I fear that I shall encounter extreme difficulty in establishing the fact. That is why I am here."

Carter made no comment. The man continued:

"When I saw my reflection in a mirror yesterday morning, I was amazed to see that my hair had turned. It is gray now—almost white. When I dressed that morning to which I have referred it was black; there was not a gray hair—no, possibly that is an exaggeration—but I can assure you that there were so few gray hairs in my head that they were not noticeable at all."

"Did you speak to any person about the change?"

"Yes. I was told that the change had been wrought during my illness."

"Were you told what had been the matter with you?"

"Merely that I had not been able to tell who I was; and that, until the last week before my discharge from the institution, I had not been in a fit physical condition to go upon the street. But there had been a decided change for the better during that last week. I had gained strength very rapidly, and had seemed to be in my right mind, save only for one thing."

"What was that?"

"The question of my identity. I had claimed to be a person whom they *knew* I was not; but as I made the claim only once—I saw their incredulity and was silent after that—it was believed that I had recovered from that form of dementia also."

"Your claim now is that, having remembered who you really are, you wished nothing to interfere with regaining your liberty, in order that you might re-establish yourself, eh?"

"Precisely that, Mr. Carter."

"Well?"

"That was yesterday morning?"

"Yes."

"The bosom of my shirt was badly soiled, although the rest of it is not so, showing that I could not have worn it more than the one day when I was taken to the hospital."

"Wait. Do you recall the date of your last clear recollection?"

"Perfectly."

"What was it?"

"The twenty-fourth of December."

"The day before Christmas."

"Yes, sir."

"To-day is the twenty-fourth of June."

"So I am informed; so I can readily believe, from the general aspect of things."

"You claim that your mind has been an absolute blank since that time?"

"Until four days ago; yes, sir."

"Tell me just how recollection returned to you."

"I awoke in the morning, on my cot at the hospital, remembering perfectly who I was, and utterly astounded by the nature of my surroundings."

"What did you do, then?"

"I remained quite still for a long time, endeavoring to straighten things out in my mind. But I found that to be quite impossible. I noticed that the windows were open, and that the air was warm, like summer; but I thought it Christmas day, nevertheless."

"Well, sir?"

"I signaled to one of the nurses. When she approached, I said 'Merry Christmas!' and I asked where I was and how it happened that I was there."

"And you were told——"

"I was told nothing. The nurse did not reply to me. She went away, and after a little two doctors stood over me and began to question me. It was then that I told who I was, and, in effect, what I have already related to you. I saw that they did not believe me; I discovered that I was thought to be wandering in my mind, and so I questioned them, in my turn."

"And they told you—what?"

"One of the doctors seated himself beside me; the other one went away. The one who remained told me that I had been taken to the hospital in an ambulance at four o'clock the preceding Christmas morning; that I had been there six months; that I had not been able to give any name; that every effort had been made to establish my identity, without success; and that the name and address I had just claimed *belonged to another person, who lives now in my house*—and—well, that is the substance of it."

"What replies did you make? How did the statement of the doctor affect you?" asked Nick.

"I was stunned, overwhelmed. I did not believe; I could not. But I did not argue; I was silent, and presently he went away and left me. After that I studied the matter over as carefully as I could do so. I realized that it was futile to make the claim I had already done; that is, to insist upon it."

"You wished, then, to get away from the hospital?"

"Most certainly. I wanted to get outside and see things for myself."

"What did you do?"

"I sent for that same doctor who had talked kindly to me. I claimed that recollection had finally returned. I clung to the first of my two baptismal names, and gave the maiden name of my mother for a surname."

"And then——"

"I was detained until yesterday morning, under close observation all the time. Then I was discharged."

"Now, sir, what is the name you claim to be your own?" the detective asked him.

"I am James Paul Westervelt," the stranger said, with undoubted emphasis. "My home is——"

"Wait," said the detective.

CHAPTER II.

A HOUSEHOLD MYSTERY.

For a full minute the detective studied the man before him.

The statement had been an astounding one; and yet, when it was made, the clear perceptions of the detective recognized three things in support of it, although there were many—hundreds, doubtless—to deny its truth.

But he saw that the man was unquestionably sincere in making it; he saw, now, that there was certainly a facial resemblance between this stranger and the man whom he knew perfectly well by sight as James Paul Westervelt; and he recalled now the qualities of the voice that had stirred within him some vague recollection of having heard it before.

"Are you aware of the gravity of the statement you have made?" he asked, at length.

"I have become aware of it since I left the hospital," was the reply, delivered quickly.

"James Paul Westervelt has never been reported to have disappeared," the detective asserted.

"I can quite believe that, sir, since I came out of the hospital."

"I know where James Paul Westervelt lives, or should live. Do you claim that to be your home?"

"Most certainly."

"James Paul Westervelt is a rich man, a very rich man."

"Yes."

"Do you claim that wealth as your own?"

"I do; without reservation."

"Fortunately the James Paul Westervelt who now lives in that house and enjoys that wealth to which we have referred is a bachelor; otherwise——"

"Otherwise I would still be the real James Paul Westervelt."

"There were no brothers—so far as you know?"

"There were no brothers. I was an only child."

"What was the maiden name of your mother—whose name you have chosen to assume?"

"Blauvelt. I gave the name of James Blauvelt at the hospital."

"What was her full name before she was married to your father?"

"Elizabeth Blauvelt. She, too, was an only child, as was also my father. I inherited the fortunes of each of them. My mother died when I was seventeen; my father when I was twenty-three. I am now forty. I will be forty-one on the twenty-fourth day of December."

"Have you seen the man who now lives in the house you claim?—who wears the name you insist belongs to you?"

"Yes."

"When, where, and how?"

"I called there, at the house, yesterday afternoon, as soon as I could gather the courage to do so."

"You called there? What happened?"

"You see, I had already been informed that another was masquerading in my name. I went to the house to claim my own."

"Appearing as you do now?"

"Yes."

"Did you believe that you could substantiate your claim, there, at the house?"

"I certainly did. I had no doubt of it whatever."

"Why? How?"

"I believed that the servants would recognize me; that my cousin and her daughter, who lived with me and kept house for me, would know me at once."

"And they did not?"

"A servant who is a stranger to me came to the door. I was informed that my cousin and her daughter are traveling in Europe. The door was shut in my face. I was thought to be a beggar."

"But you say you saw—the other man?"

"Yes; and spoke to him."

"How was that?"

"He came up the steps of the house as I was turning away from the door."

"You saw in him a likeness to your former self—that is, to the man you claim to be?"

"A perfect likeness; yes."

"How, from your standpoint, do you account for that?"

"I do not account for it. I have not attempted to do so."

"You spoke to the man?"

"Yes."

"What was said?"

"I asked him, in the most respectful tone I could assume—only I am afraid it was more in the manner of a demand—if he was Mr. Westervelt. He replied that he was, and asked what he could do for me. It was too much, Mr. Carter. On the impulse of the moment, I replied:

"'You can tell me, if you will, the history of last Christmas day, and of the evening and night that preceded it.'"

"You should not have done that—if you really believe in your claim. If there is any real substance to your story, your remark would give warning to the man who has usurped all your prerogatives."

"I know it; I realize it now."

"What remark did he make to you in reply?"

"He did not speak. He passed me, inserted a key in the lock of the door, and entered the house. I was left alone on the steps in front of it."

"What did you do then?"

"Nothing. I came away."

"At present, according to your statement regarding him, that man more closely resembles the James Paul Westervelt of Christmas time than you do yourself. Is that correct?"

"Without question."

"Have you ever known of another person who resembled you so strangely?"

"No, sir."

"You have no clue as to who this man might be, supposing your claim to be correct?"

"None at all."

"You have no suggestion to make as to where that other man might have come from, or who he might have been before he took your name, always supposing that you are in the right?"

"None at all."

"Do you recall that your mother or father ever mentioned a relative of the family who resembled you, as a young man?"

"I do not. I am quite sure that no such statement was ever made by either of them."

"The whole affair is a mystery to you, then? As deep a mystery as it is—we will say—to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, as to yourself."

"Yes, sir."

"I believe you to be quite sincere in what you have told me; but—isn't it possible that you are laboring under a hallucination?"

"No, sir; it is not possible."

"Do you recall the names of the servants who were in the house at the time you say you went out from it the day before Christmas?"

"Perfectly. There were five of them."

"Who were they?"

"Mrs. Grimes, the housekeeper; Mary Holmes, her assistant; Jean Lefevre, the cook; Thomas Tompkins, butler; Patrick Carr, who acted in the capacity of footman and partly as my valet. And then, also, there was the chauffeur, Augustus Phillips, a negro; but he did not sleep in the house."

"Do you believe that those persons would aid you in establishing the identity you claim?"

"Such is my belief; or, rather, it was, until I saw the man. Now I don't know what to believe or think."

"You think that possibly they have been deceived, as well as others?"

"I think it quite likely—if they are now inmates of the house. But it is my opinion that not one of them is there now."

"You believe that they have been sent away?"

"Certainly. No person or persons would be so keenly observant of any change, or so quick to notice a difference in personality, as household servants. They see their masters and mistresses as no other persons see them."

"That is true. What is the name of the woman you claim is your cousin? And her daughter?"

"Mrs. Price is the name of my cousin; she is really a second cousin. Her daughter is named Cora."

"How old is the daughter?"

"She should be, now, in her twentieth year."

"Did you live amicably together under the one roof?"

"Not always. My cousin is a strange woman, given to tempers and moods; but she was penniless, and—well, I gave her a home and a stated income, more on Cora's account than for any other reason."

"Do you believe that they would assist you in establishing the identity you claim?"

"I believe that Cora would do so; I am not so sure about her mother."

"Why?"

"For the double reason that she is so taken up with herself that she has not time to observe closely anything save herself; and because, notwithstanding all that I have done for her in the past, she has never liked me."

"Why do you believe in the loyalty of the daughter, Cora?"

"Because I have always been excessively fond of her, and she of me. She was ten years old when they came to live with me. She has been my care and ward ever since."

"You speak almost as if you were more than merely fond of her," said Nick, smiling.

"I was. I am. But for the discrepancy in years, I would long ago have asked her to be my wife. That is why I am a bachelor to-day."

"I see. How did she——"

"Understand me, Mr. Carter; I have never said one word of love to her, or any word at all which might possibly be construed as tending that way. She has always called me Uncle Jim, and has regarded me in that light."

"It is likely, is it not, that she knew you more intimately than any other person in the house?"

"She knew me as nobody else knew me. It is because of that fact that I cannot make it seem reasonable that she has really been deceived. In fact, I rely upon her, more than upon anything else, to establish me in my rights. No stranger could have gone into that house and have represented me, in private life, as Cora Price knows me."

"Then she and her mother should be found at once," said Nick.

CHAPTER III.

REACHING OUT FOR A CLUE.

The circumstances were preposterous, according to one view of the case.

Nick Carter knew, as all the city knew—that is, counting those persons who were familiar with the personality of James Paul Westervelt—that he was not known to have disappeared at all; that he had been seen in and about the city throughout all those months of time during which this man now before the de-

tective claimed that he, the right Westervelt, had been immersed in forgetfulness in one of the city hospitals.

James Paul Westervelt had been, too, a personage in the city.

He was a man of wealth; a man of affairs; a man who delighted in taking part in public doings; one who spoke at meetings; one who took an active interest in politics, and whose picture had been frequently printed in the papers.

Just at the moment Nick could not remember that he had seen or read anything particular about Westervelt during the preceding six months. He decided to investigate in order to discover if the man now known as Westervelt had been as active as usual during that lapsed six months.

While he thought, he regarded the man before him closely.

The detective believed the man, and yet he did not believe him; the thing was preposterous on the face of it, and yet the story seemed straight and logical for all that.

Told to the ordinary citizen about town, it would have sounded absurd; but Nick Carter had known of many incidents that were no less absurd on the face of them which were nevertheless proved to be true in the end.

He had not a doubt, nor the shadow of one, of the sincerity of the man who had told him the strange tale. At least, this stranger believed himself to be James Paul Westervelt.

As he thought over the matter, he decided to appear to accept the man's story, just as it had been told to him, and then to investigate it thoroughly; in the meantime, he felt that it was necessary to study this man with close attention, and not to permit him to get out of his sight more than was necessary.

The poor fellow looked starved, bloodless; and, notwithstanding his seedy appearance, his unshaven face and unshorn head, there was still a certain air of the patrician about him which convinced the detective that —no matter who he might really be, he was still a person of education and refinement.

"I have decided to accept your story as true, for the present," he said finally. "I——"

"Oh, how can I ever thank you, sir?" the man broke in; and there were unshed tears in his eyes as he spoke.

"Wait," said Nick. "I have said that I shall accept your story as true—for the present. But I do that with a mental reservation. The reservation is that, after all, it may be a mistake. But at least I can assure you that I believe in *you;* that is, in your entire sincerity. I am convinced that you *believe* what you have told me, and now the thing is to make me believe it as you do. Will you reply to any questions I shall ask you quite frankly?"

"I will, sir, most certainly."

"Then the first one is, When have you eaten a hearty meal?"

The man smiled wanly. It was not at all the question he had expected.

"Not since I left the hospital," he replied, with downcast eyes.

"That was yesterday morning, after breakfast?"

"Yes."

"Have you had nothing to eat since then?"

"Yes. The doctor gave me a quarter as I was leaving. I have made that do; but really I am very hungry."

Nick crossed the room and rang an electric bell for Joseph, to whom he gave some hurried orders. Then he said:

"Where did you sleep last night?"

"It was quite warm, you know," replied the man apologetically. "I managed to get some sleep on a bench in the City Hall Park."

"I thought so, or something very like it. You may come with me now to the dining room, if you please. Joseph will soon have a meal ready for you; after that we will talk."

The detective took him to the dining room and left him there alone, saying that he would return by the time the meal was finished; then he sought his study again, to which he summoned Chick and Patsy, his assistants.

"You both know James Paul Westervelt by name and by sight," he said.

They nodded, and the detective continued:

"I want both of you to go out at once on the same trail; you may divide the conduct of the investigation you are to make to suit yourselves; but I want results."

They nodded again.

"I want to know everything that can be raked up concerning James Paul Westervelt since the morning of the twenty-fourth day of last December. His habits, his pursuits, his follies; when, where, and how often he has spoken at public meetings since that time, and upon what subjects. I want to know with whom he has been on friendly terms—in fact, I want everything about him that can be found out. Got that?"

"Yes," they replied, almost together.

"On the twenty-fourth of last December there were five servants in the Westervelt home; that is, they were

there in the morning of that day. They were—take down the names—a Mrs. Grimes, housekeeper; Mary Holmes, maid; Jean Lefevre, cook; Thomas Tompkins, butler, and Patrick Carr, footman, valet, general factotem. There was also a negro connected with the establishment, by name Augustus Phillips. I want to know who, if any, of those servants are still employed there, and I want those of them who are not there now *found*—that is, located; and I want all that information as quickly as possible. Chick, is Ida in the house?"

"Yes. She is in her room, reading."

"Send her to me as you go out."

Three minutes later Ida Jones, another of the renowned detective's aids, entered the room and dropped upon a chair indicated by her chief.

"Ida," he said to her without preamble, "do you know the Westervelt mansion? The James Paul Westervelt residence?"

"Perfectly," she replied. "That is, I know where it is. I have never been inside the house."

"Well, I want you to get inside of it. Do you know Mr. Westervelt by sight?"

"Yes."

"All the better."

"What is it you wish me to do?" she asked him.

"The regular staff of servants in that house has formerly included two women, a housekeeper and a maid. I want you to find a way to enter that house in one capacity or the other, or in a new one. I don't know just how you will accomplish it, but I do know that you will manage to do so somehow."

"Yes. I think it can be done. What is expected of me after I get there, supposing that much of the assignment to be already accomplished?"

"I want the gossip of the household; I want to know everything that you can possibly learn about the head of the house—Mr. Westervelt. I will tell you this much: There is a suspicion that the present Mr. Westervelt is not the same man who lived there, under that name, before last Christmas. That suspicion must be proved true or false."

Ida nodded her head with emphasis.

"I understand perfectly," she said.

"Here is a list of the servants who were employed in the house on the morning of the twenty-fourth day of last December. Perhaps one or more of them may be there still. If any of them are there now, I want to know it; also the names of those who are not there—and if you can secure the addresses of those who are not there, or any of them, do so."

"And my reports to you?"

"The minute you discover anything which you deem of importance, find a way to let me know about it without delay. How will you gain admittance to the house? How will you manage to remain there, Ida?"

"I don't know—yet; but I will accomplish it, as you have said, somehow."

"Good. I think you will. You are a master at that sort of thing."

When he was alone, the detective sat for a considerable time, thinking upon the strange tale he had heard.

There was much in what the stranger had told him that seemed to bear the stamp of authenticity. For example, the statements concerning the father and mother of James Paul Westervelt.

Presently he descended again to the reception room, where he found his unbidden guest awaiting him, and the change that the food had wrought in the man was at once noticeable.

"We will talk together for a short time," the detective told him; "and then I intend to provide you with a small sum of money. With it you will purchase yourself some clean linen, get a shave and a hair-cut, and otherwise make yourself presentable."

"But, my dear sir, I——"

"That, with a full stomach and the certain knowledge that you will have a good bed to sleep in to-night, will go far toward rendering you quite yourself. If you *are* James Paul Westervelt you can easily repay me for all that I do, afterward; if you are *not*, be assured that I shall not regret the loss of it."

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Carter. Your kindness to a man——"

"Don't try. Can you give me a description of the interior of your house, and of each of the rooms it contains? I have already assured you that I would assume your statements to be correct."

"Yes. I can describe every room in detail—as they were when I last saw them."

"Very good. I shall ask you to write out those descriptions, as completely as possible, as soon as you return here, after you have visited a barber and a haberdasher. I will want to know about the pictures on the walls, the furniture in the rooms, the carpets and rugs on the floors—in fact, every detail you can recall."

"I understand. It is for the purpose of proving me."

"Partly so. Now, how long a time were those several servants in your employ?"

"Mrs. Grimes has been a member of the household since I was ten years old. She is a woman of sixty, or more, now. Mary Holmes came at the time my cousin came to live with me; that was nine years ago, approximately. I have had Tompkins, the butler, about ten years, and Carr about five."

"And Phillips, the chauffeur?"

"Nearly a year."

"In case any or all of them have now left the house, would you know where to find them?"

"No. I would not have an idea about that."

"Before you lost consciousness, last winter, you had some intimate friends, had you not?"

"Oh, yes; more or less intimate. I was never one of the intimate kind, however."

"You were a club man?"

"Yes; four clubs altogether, although I did not frequent but two of them."

"Did you yesterday, or have you since you left the hospital, sought any of your old acquaintances?"

"No. I thought of doing so, but decided to seek you instead."

CHAPTER IV.

HUNTING AN IDENTITY.

The detective was silent for a moment.

Truth to tell, he was somewhat at a loss regarding the best way to "get at" this strange character and stranger circumstance by which he was confronted.

The entire matter was so complex—and yet the very complexity of it was enticing and alluring. He knew that the important thing to do now, in order to get at the meat of the affair, was to pretend almost entire confidence in the statements made by the man.

"Will you permit me to address you by your given name, sir?" he asked presently, with a smile.

"Most certainly," was the cordial reply. "I will be proud to have you do so."

"Thank you. You see, it will avoid confounding names. I shall therefore address you, in the future, as James; and in referring to that other person whom you consider an interloper we will use the name Westervelt."

The client nodded acquiescence.

"This is no reflection upon your own claims to that name, James," the detective continued. "It is for the sake of avoiding unnecessary complexity."

"I understand you thoroughly, and I quite approve."

"Very well."

"You may even address me as Blauvelt, if you deem it wise, at any time. That is the name, you know, by which I am now entered upon the books at the hospital."

"Yes."

"And now, Mr. Carter, what added information can I give you?"

"Are you sure that now your memory is quite clear?" asked Nick.

"Absolutely so."

"There are no clouds upon it? Not one?"

"Not one; not an indication of one."

"Do you perfectly recall your childhood? Your boyhood? Your young manhood?"

"Perfectly—as perfectly as any man of my age could do so."

"Let us hark back, then, to the time of your earliest recollection."

"Yes."

"Do you recall any relatives of the family, no matter how far removed, with whom your father or your mother were at odds?"

"No; I don't think I do."

"Aren't you sure?"

"Reasonably so; and yet there is somewhere within me a vague recollection of something of the sort that came to my knowledge very early in my life. I cannot put my finger on it, however."

"Is it your idea that it was associated with your father's or with your mother's branch of the family?"

"I cannot reply to that at the present moment; but I will study over it, and I have no doubt that it will come to me."

"Which branch of the family do you resemble—if you know—your father's or your mother's side?"

"Rather my mother's side than my father's."

"Few men have lived to your age without making some enemies; you are not an exception, are you?"

"By no means. I have made many enemies in the past; but most of them are of a political character."

"Think upon that phase of the question, also; and think with a pad of paper in front of you, upon which you can jot down the names and the particulars of each person who is, or who has been in the past, inimical to you."

"I will do that."

"Just how is Mrs. Price related to you?"

"My mother was her cousin on the side of my maternal grandmother."

"Are there other collateral relatives of the same branch?"

"Yes; I think so. I don't know positively about them; but I have heard of other distant relatives on that side of the family."

"Male or female?"

"Really, I don't know."

"What was the name of your maternal grandmother?"

"Hawkins."

"Has there ever been a man by that name who, at one time or another within your recollection, claimed relationship with you?"

The eyes of James Blauvelt—we will call him so for the sake of brevity—flashed.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Now that you speak of it, there has been such an occasion—in fact, two such occasions."

"Good; tell me about them."

"I remember an occasion which happened when I was a little boy—I cannot say how old I was, only that I was less than ten. I was traveling with my father and mother at the time. We were aboard a train bound from Buffalo to New York; in a Wagner car. That was long ago, you see."

"Yes."

"I remember that a gentleman entered the car, accompanied by a small lad of about my own age. I can see them now as they stopped and spoke with my father and mother. I can remember being told that the boy was my cousin, and that after they had gone from the car, I asked how he was my cousin."

"Do you recall the reply that was made to that question?"

"Perfectly."

"What was it?"

"My father laughed, and said that the gentleman, the father of the boy, was a distant relative of my mother's, and that the boy was only my distant cousin. I remember that word, distant."

"Is that all there is to tell about that particular incident?"

"Yes."

"Now, about the other one to which you referred?"

"That happened at a political meeting which I attended, and where I made a speech."

"When was that?"

"Seven or eight years ago."

"Where was it?"

"At Tammany Hall."

"Won't you try to recall the date? Or even the year and month?"

"Wait. Yes; I can. It happened longer ago than I supposed at first. It was at the time there was a three-cornered fight on for the mayoralty; the time when General Tracy, Henry George, and Robert van Wyck were in the race."

"That was in the autumn of eighteen and ninety-seven," said the detective.

"Sure. It was twelve years ago. I made the speech referred to in October of that year. I think—I am *sure,* now, that the date was the twenty-third."

"Good. Now, what was the incident you refer to?"

"Why, at the close of the meeting I was accosted by a gentleman who pushed himself forward and clasped my hand, claiming me as a distant cousin—again that word, you see—and who said some fulsome things about the speech I had made."

"What else?"

"I did not place him, and said so; then he reminded me that long before that, when we were children, we had met—as I have already described that other meeting to you."

"Truly," thought the detective, "if this man is manufacturing what he states, he does it superbly." Aloud, he said: "Did you at that time notice any resemblance between you and the person who spoke to you?"

"No. I remember that he was full-bearded. I was smooth-shaven."

"That man was, doubtless, more nearly related to your cousin, Mrs. Price, than to you."

"Without doubt."

"You never saw the man again?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Tell me about Mrs. Price."

"What about her?"

"Her tastes, and all that. Is she a handsome woman?"

"Quite so, I believe. She is so called."

"Extravagant? Fond of society?"

"Exceedingly—to both questions."

"Light or dark?"

"Dark—like all the Blauvelts. She was a Blauvelt before her marriage."

"She is a widow, I suppose?"

"She divorced her husband long ago. I have been told that he married again, but I don't know as to that."

"By the way, you did not tell me the name of the man who introduced himself to you as your distant relative at the political meeting."

"I do not know it. If I heard it I have utterly forgotten what it was; but I assume that it was Blauvelt."

"Why do you assume that?"

"For no reason at all save that it is a family name."

"Other names could have married into the family."

"To be sure."

"How old a woman is Mrs. Price?"

"Thirty-nine. She looks ten years younger when she is fixed up."

"James, here is a very personal question; a very intimate one."

"Well?"

"Did Mrs. Price ever give you reason to believe that if you should ask her to marry you she might accept? I want you to reply to the question impersonally; there is no thought of self-conceit in this."

"Frankly, then, for a time after she first came to live at my house, I did, more than once, have that idea; and I will confess that I was greatly attracted to her. But——" He hesitated.

"Go on, please," said the detective.

"Well, to be quite frank again, the longer we lived together under the same roof, the less her personality appealed to me. I found her to be selfish, exacting, inquisitive, and suspicious."

"And I have no doubt that you permitted her to see the change in your attitude toward her."

"Very likely that is true," admitted Blauvelt.

The detective smiled broadly.

"I think that is all for the present," he said. "Now you had better do your marketing, as I have already suggested."

CHAPTER V.

HITTING THE TRAIL.

Nick left the house soon after his strange client had done so. His first call was at the hospital where the unknown stranger had been cared for so long a time, and he found the statement made to him to be correct in every detail, so far as they had been known to the patient.

The detective read carefully the history of the case, as such histories are entered upon the books of such an institution; but there was nothing in it that was of particular interest to him now.

When taken to the hospital, several of his ribs had been fractured, the plura was ruptured, and he was for a considerable time in a precarious condition. There were contusions all over his body and upon his head; he appeared as if he had been run down by a vehicle of some sort—a car, an automobile, or an electric truck; a policeman had found him and called an ambulance.

Nick Carter next sought the proper station house and inquired for that particular officer, who, fortunately, was within the building at the time.

"Oh, yes; I remember the case very well," said the officer, when the detective questioned him. "I found the man at four o'clock in the morning. He was breathing, but he was unconscious. I rang for an ambulance and he was taken to the hospital. Then I reported the matter to the lieutenant at the desk."

"Tell me what your own impressions were at the time," said Nick.

"My impressions?"

"Yes. Had the man been assaulted, or was he run down by a vehicle in the street?"

"I thought he had been run over. He had been robbed of everything of value that had been on him, if he had anything; and his appearance was that he probably had money, and all that goes with it, you know."

"What was your opinion at the time regarding the supposed robbery?"

"Well, I figured it out that some sneak had happened along after the man was run over, and had gone through him."

"And left him where he was, to die?"

"No; not exactly."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I discovered that the man had been dragged from the middle of the street into the areaway where I found him. There was plenty of evidence of that. I so reported."

"That is what made you suppose that a nighthawk had gone through him after he was hurt, is it?"

"Yes."

"And you did not associate the accident with the robbery, only in that way?"

"No."

"Did you search him when you found him?"

"Not until two other officers from adjoining beats joined me. Then we went through his pockets to find out who he was, if possible."

"And you found nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing. He had been skinned as clean as a bull pout for cooking."

"Can you describe his personal appearance to me?"

"Not very well. It was a long time ago. I remember that he had black hair, that he was smoothly shaven, as if he had been shaved recently, and that I thought him a gentleman of position in the world.

After that I left him to the hospital authorities. The lieutenant and our plain-clothes men took it out of my hands, of course. His collar, and tie, and cuffs were missing. I found his hat in the adjoining areaway. His face was badly bruised and discolored."

"Was it on your regular beat that you found him?"

"Yes."

"How long a time was it after you had passed that spot before?"

"Two hours."

"Are you positive that he was not there in that areaway when you passed the spot two hours earlier?"

"Yes."

"Tell me exactly where it was that you discovered him."

"In Twenty-eighth Street, between Third and Lexington Avenues; in the areaway of an unoccupied house. The number——"

"I have that already. I merely wished to establish that the hospital record is correct."

"Very good, sir."

"Is that all you have to offer about the case?"

"Yes, sir; that is all I know."

"Has it occurred to you that the man might have been injured in some other part of the city, and that he was afterward taken to that spot in the vehicle that ran him down?" asked the detective.

"I will admit that such a thing had not occurred to me, sir."

"And that the robbery might have been committed during the time that the unconscious man was being transported as I have suggested?"

"No. I had not thought of it in that way. It is possible, however, although I don't see the logic of such a proceeding."

"The day before Christmas, and Christmas day itself, were fine, as I remember them," said the detective musingly. "The man might have been run down by joy riders, and have been carried away by them."

"That is possible, of course."

A little later Nick called up police headquarters on the telephone.

"This is Nick Carter talking," he said. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly. What is it?" came the instant response.

"I would like to have you send out a general inquiry to all the station houses below Seventy-second Street, asking for a record of all accidents that were reported to have occurred during the night of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of last December; and of any incident, so reported, which looked like an accident."

"The report will be ready for you within an hour, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you. If you will mail it to me at my house that will be sufficient."

The detective glanced at his watch; then he betook himself to the place where he knew that the Democratic leader of the assembly district in which James Paul Westervelt lived could be found. His name was Daniel O'Leary, and there was a slight acquaintance between the leader and the detective.

"How are you, Dan?" said Nick, as he entered the room from which Mr. O'Leary directed the affairs of his district.

"So, so, Nick. Take a seat. What are you after? Want a job with the white wings?"

"Not exactly. I'm looking for information."

"What about?"

"What do you know about Westervelt?"

"Eh? Who?"

"James Paul Westervelt."

"What's the matter with 'Silk Stockings'—that's what we call him—anything?"

"That is what I am trying to find out. This is in strict confidence, Dan."

"Sure. What's up?"

"Hasn't he been acting rather strangely of late? You can talk to me as confidentially as if I were a father confessor, Dan. You know that."

"Sure."

"Well, answer me that. Hasn't Westervelt been acting rather strangely of late—say during the last six months?"

"I don't know as to that, Nick. I don't know the man, personally, very well. He's much too offish for my class, you know. I don't train with his sort."

"I know."

"There has been a whole lot of kicking in regard to him lately; that is all I know."

"What about?"

"Say, you go down to the hall and see Creighton—Mike Creighton. You'll find him there. Tell him I sent you, and that he's to open up—wide. He'll do it. Wait, I'll give you a line to him."

"Can't you tell me something yourself first? What has the kicking been about?"

"Oh, just a general kick. He used to be an easy mark, you know. He'd cough up whenever he was asked; but lately he has become a tightwad—see?"

"Yes."

"The boys used to let him think that he was having his say, and his way, too, to a certain extent, so long as he was liberal with the dough; but he has put a padlock and chain on his bank roll lately that would haul a twelve-inch log."

"I understand. Go on, Dan."

"The boys—some of them—I wasn't in the bunch—made what they called a last try at him about a month ago, to see if they couldn't induce him to loosen up. They organized a meeting in his honor, and invited him to address them on his favorite subject—one that he had never been known to decline."

"What was it?"

"'Necessary Reforms in Anticipation of the Next Mayoralty Campaign.' Ain't that a corker, though, Nick? But he wouldn't bite; not on your life. Always before he has swallowed the bait, hook, line, bob, and sinker, but this time he wouldn't even nibble. It was funny; but it was pathetic, too." O'Leary laughed. "There is wild talk about dropping him altogether. But you see Creighton. He'll tell you all about it. Fill your pockets with cigars and hand him a few. Going? So-long, Nick. Run in again when you have a chance."

The detective sought Creighton without delay.

"Westervelt?" said Creighton, after the preliminaries were adjusted and Nick had begun his questioning. "That dude? Oh, he's a down-and-outer now. He'd like to dress the whole Tammany outfit in top hats and silk hose. He's going to be dropped with a sickening thud; take it from me."

"Why?"

"He's got cold feet."

"Won't he loosen up any more?"

"Not for a cent."

"Since when?"

"Some time last winter; I forget just when."

"Could you tell me when he made his last contribution—to the 'boys'?"

"Sure. I know. It was the day before last Christmas."

"Eh? The twenty-fourth of last December? Are you positive about that?"

"I should think so; he gave the money to me—to pass around as I thought best. I passed it around all right, all right; that is, most of it."

"Did he bring it to you himself, without being asked to do so?"

"Sure he did. He always had done so every Christmas. Two thousand dollars."

"What time of day was it when he brought that money to you?"

"Half-past three in the afternoon," was the reply.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAIL GROWS WARM.

"Did Mr. Westervelt give you the amount in cash, or was it a check?" the detective asked of Creighton, after a short pause during which Nick Carter had turned over in his mind the intelligence he had just received.

It was rather a remarkable fact that one of the last things reported to have been done by James Paul Westervelt should have happened only a short time before the stranger who now claimed the name with all its prerogatives was stricken down somewhere in the streets of New York.

"Cash," was the reply. "There were twenty one-hundred-dollar bills in the wad."

"What remark did he make when he gave the money to you?"

"Oh, I don't know. Let me see. He said something about it's being his usual Christmas contribution, and that he hoped I would distribute it to the best advantage for all concerned; and a lot more rot of that sort."

"I suppose he meant that he hoped too much of it wouldn't stick to your fingers?" the detective said, smiling.

"Sure; but he might have saved his breath. The boys were on. They knew he was due."

"What else did he say?"

"He said that he'd just been to the bank to draw the money for us; and—oh, yes—that he hoped he would soon have a chance to talk to us again on a new subject that interested him very much."

"Did he state what the subject was?"

"Sure. We have invited him, since then, to speak on the subject. That's why we're sore; he won't do it. He's got cold feet."

"What was the subject?"

"'Necessary Reforms in Anticipation of——'"

"Never mind. I know the rest. Dan told me. Do you know at what bank he drew the money he gave to you?"

"Yes. He mentioned it. The National Midland. It's a branch of one of the Western banks, I've been told."

"Creighton, have you seen and talked with Westervelt since that time?"

"I have; three times."

"How did he appear to you on each of those three occasions?"

"As offish as—well, as a strange cat; slick, and sort of purring, but you couldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole."

"And that was what you went to see him for, wasn't it? To touch him?"

"Sure thing. That's the only thing he was good for. Otherwise, he was a blasted nuisance in every way."

"Did he seem strange to you on each of those three occasions?"

"He certainly did. Why, the first time I went to see him, after he gave me the money, he actually pretended not to know who I was or where I came from."

"And were you obliged to inform him?"

"I did inform him, if that's what you mean."

"I suppose he remembered you on the second and third occasions when you called?"

"Sure."

"Did he look differently, as well as act differently?"

"Yes, I think he did, now you mention it."

"Tell me just how he looked differently."

"I don't believe I can do that. It was something intangible, and I put it down to his change of heart toward the bunch down here. It was my idea then, and it is so now, that some guy had put him wise to the fact that we had been playing him for a good thing—for that is about what it amounted to, when all's said."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"About three weeks ago."

"Where was it?"

"At his house."

"Did you have any difficulty in getting to him?"

"No."

"Tell me just what he said in refusing the requests you made to him."

"He told me that he had decided to make no more public speeches. He said that he would continue to send contributions to us, at election time, but that we were not to look to him for anything else; and that I was to tell my associates that he preferred hereafter to remain a silent and a passive member of the organization. There was a lot more, but that was the substance of it."

"When you called at his house those three times, whom did you see, besides Westervelt?"

"Nobody—only the man who opened the door for me."

"Thank you. I won't bother you any more, Creighton."

"Say, Mr. Carter, what's up, anyhow?" asked Creighton.

"Nothing that would interest you. I am seeking information, that's all."

"Well, you've got all I had to give you."

"I realize that; thank you."

The detective made his way straight to the bank from which the money had been drawn that was given to Creighton. He talked for a moment through the paying teller's window. He told who he was, exhibited his authority—and asked the teller if he remembered the occasion of Westervelt's having drawn two thousand dollars in cash from that window on the day before last Christmas.

"I know it to be the sort of information which banks are not in the habit of giving out, but it is important that I should know, for Mr. Westervelt's sake," the detective said.

"I remember that he drew three thousand dollars in cash that day," the teller replied. "He has drawn exactly the same amount in cash every Christmas eve since I have been here, and that is five years."

"What time of the day was it?"

"Somewhere about half-past two."

"Now, if you please, a question which will try your memory."

"Yes?"

"Can you—do you remember the next check after that one, drawn by him, that was presented to you by any person, no matter who?"

"I do remember it, most distinctly."

"Why so? You speak with emphasis."

"Because he presented it in person; because it was at that time that he changed his signature."

"Changed his signature? Will you explain just what you mean?"

"Certainly; only I wish you had gone to the cashier instead of coming to me. But I suppose it's all right."

"It is, I assure you."

"Well, up to that time all his checks had been signed with his full name—James Paul Westervelt. He changed the signature that time to J. P. Westervelt. That is the way they have been signed ever since."

"Did he give any reason for making the change?"

"Not to me. He may have done so in his talk with the cashier—but I don't think so."

"Did you notice any difference in the handwriting after the change was made?"

"I did; and I spoke to the cashier about it."

"Will you tell me what it was that you said to the cashier?"

"I called his attention to the difference that I had noticed, and I remember that I said that if Westervelt had not appeared at my window in person with the check I would not have cashed it until he did appear."

"You refer to his apearing at your window, which suggests that I ask you if you noted any change, or difference, in his personal appearance at that time—when he made the change in the signature?"

"No, I can't say that I did—only that he was pale and thin, I thought. I said so, and he replied that he had been quite ill, though confined to the house but a few days."

"Do you recall the date of that incident?"

"Yes; it was the second of January."

The detective thanked the teller for the information he had given, and returned to his home, where he found his strange client awaiting him.

A great change had been wrought during the interval. It was remarkable how much difference a shave, a hair-cut, clean linen, and better spirits resulting therefrom had made.

"James," said the detective, as soon as they were together, "I want you to carry your memory back to that day before Christmas which is so vital in the case you have brought to me."

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"Upon the statements you will make concerning it will depend my belief—or much of it—in the claims you make."

"Very well; I am quite willing to stand the test."

"In that case, I wish you to carry your supposed recollection back to that day. Begin at the moment you got out of bed, and tell me everything you can recall that happened that day—*everything*, mind you."

Without a moment of hesitation, Nick Carter's client replied:

"I don't know the exact time when I left my bed, but presumably it was about eight in the morning. Carr had laid out this suit of clothes for me, a suit of new underclothing I had just purchased, and one out of two dozen new shirts that had just been sent home to me. He asked me, I remember, if I would wear one of the new shirts, or if I preferred one that I had worn previously. I took the new one. It was fate, wasn't it, that I should have dressed in clothing that bore no laundry mark?"

"Perhaps so. Now tell me every incident of that day."

"I breakfasted within an hour; Tompkins served me; I read the paper. About eleven I went out."

"Where did you go?"

"It was a fine day. I walked downtown as far as the Waldorf. I remained there, possibly an hour, doing nothing."

"Did you see and talk with any of your acquaintances at that time?"

"Yes; one."

"Who was that?"

"I encountered Charlie Charles, an old-time actor, and long an acquaintance of mine. I think we chatted together for ten or fifteen minutes; then we left the hotel together and strolled down Fifth Avenue. At the corner of Twenty-fifth Street we parted. I don't know where he went, but I entered the Hoffman House, took a drink at the bar, passed a short time in a broker's office on the Twenty-fifth Street side of the house, and then took my lunch there."

"Did you take your luncheon alone?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT WESTERVELT REMEMBERED.

"Where did you go after you had eaten your luncheon?" the detective asked.

"I returned to the broker's office. Often I met acquaintances there, but that day I did not do so. I suppose the fact that it was the day before Christmas is accountable for that circumstance. People are apt to be out of town at that time."

"Yes. And then——"

"I am not quite sure as to the time, Mr. Carter, but my recollection is that I went out from the Hoffman House shortly after two o'clock—say a quarter or twenty minutes past the hour."

"Yes."

"I walked from there to the National Midland Bank, where I drew and cashed a check for three thousand dollars."

"Good," said Nick. "What did you do with that cash? Do you remember that?"

"Certainly. I gave two thousand of it to a political friend named Creighton, to distribute among—well, among a certain class of so-called politicians who expected something of the kind from me. It has been my habit to do that sort of thing for several years, you know."

"So I have heard. Do you remember the denomination of the bills you gave to the man Creighton?"

"Perfectly. It was always my habit to give him the money in one-hundred-dollar bills."

"Good again. You still had a thousand dollars in cash in your pocket. What did you do with that amount?"

"Pardon me; I had nearly fifteen hundred dollars in my pocket. I had the balance with me when I visited the bank."

"Well, what became of it?"

"I spent nine hundred dollars of it at Tiffany's for presents for Mrs. Price and her daughter."

"So you had approximately six hundred dollars still on your person when you came away from Tiffany's?"

"Yes."

"Did you spend that during the day?"

"Not more than a hundred dollars of it."

"Then when the accident occurred to you, or you were stricken down, you must have had four or five hundred dollars on your person?"

"Yes. I should have had about that amount."

"Now, concerning the presents you purchased for Cora Price and her mother."

"Yes?"

"Did you order them sent to your home, or did you bring them away from Tiffany's with you?"

"They were in two small packages. I put them in one of my pockets and brought them away from the store with me."

"So they were still in your personal possession, as far as you know, when the accident happened?"

"Oh, yes; there is no doubt of that."

"Do you remember the man from whom you purchased them?"

"Yes; a Mr. Webb."

"Could you identify them if you should see them again?"

"I am sure that I could. I am something of an expert in the matter of gems and their settings."

"Do you think that Webb also could identify them?"

"There isn't the slightest doubt as to that. You see, I had ordered them from Mr. Webb two or three weeks before that. The settings were, in a way, unique."

"Can you describe them to me?"

"Yes. Both were pins made in the form of stars. Each had an initial in the centre. One bore the letter C; the other bore the letter P. The C was made of diamonds and rubies; the P was made of diamonds and emeralds."

"Those pins must have been taken from you at the time your other effects were stolen," said the detective.

"Without doubt."

"When you were found in the areaway by the officer, your collar and tie were missing; also your cuffs."

"The collar and the cuffs bore laundry marks; that may explain that particular point."

"Perhaps. Did you wear a scarf pin?"

"Yes."

"And cuff links?"

"Yes."

"Describe them."

"The scarf pin was one that had associations; it was not particularly valuable. It represented a bar of music enameled on plain gold with the cleff sign and the notes studded with chip diamonds. The notes read: 'Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot.'"

"And the links?"

"Were plain gold with enameled initials—the letter W—in chip diamonds."

"Thank you. You say that the suit of clothes you now wear was the one in which you dressed that morning?"

"Yes."

"Where did you buy the suit?"

"In London; to wear on the steamer, crossing. I returned from a short trip abroad in November. The suit never fitted me. I rarely wore it at all. I don't know why I happened to select it that morning."

"Of whom did you purchase it?"

"From a tailor named Simpkins, in Bond Street."

"Do you remember the date?"

"It was the day before I sailed for home—the tenth of November."

The detective paused in his questioning long enough to write a message and to ring the bell for Joseph.

"Have this message sent at once," he ordered. It was addressed to "Simpkins, Tailor, Bond Street, London."

"Now, James," said the detective, when they were again alone, "where did you go to spend the other hundred dollars you have mentioned?"

"Oh, I visited several stores. I wandered about, looking into shop windows. It was the day before Christmas, and I am as much interested in that time of year as a child."

"Did you dine at home that evening?"

"Yes."

"Did Mrs. Price and her daughter dine with you?"

"No; they were not at home. That is the reason

why I kept their presents in my pocket. In fact, after I had left the house again, I recalled that I had forgotten to put them in the safe, as I had intended to do."

"What time did you leave the house again, and where did you go?"

"I was lonely. I was disappointed because Cora—and her mother, of course—had not been at home to dine with me on Christmas eve. I went to a theatre; I saw Jack Mason, in 'The Witching Hour.'"

"You remember leaving the theatre?"

"Perfectly."

"Were you alone?"

"Yes."

"What did you do then?"

"I am fond of walking, as you have doubtless discovered by what I have already told you. I started to walk home. I had not eaten much dinner, and I found I was hungry. I went to Churchill's and ate a broiled lobster and drank a mug of ale with it."

"Still unaccompanied?"

"Yes; I was all alone."

"Did you notice any acquaintances at Churchill's?"

"No. It was the only time I had ever been in the place."

"Were you conscious, at any time during that day or evening—or did you at any time suspect—that you were followed?"

"No. I never thought of such a thing."

"What time was it when you left Churchill's?"

"Somewhere about one o'clock, I should say. I don't know."

"Where did you go then?"

"I walked through Forty-seventh Street, toward Sixth Avenue, intending to go home. I started through the street on the south side of it. I was about halfway between Seventh and Sixth Avenues when I turned slantingly across the street to avoid passing in front of a building that was under construction. I remember stepping from the curb into the roadway—and that is all I do remember until I came to my senses in the hospital."

"Have you no idea what struck you?"

"No."

"Whether it was a man, or a vehicle of some sort?"

"I haven't the remotest idea—only it seems as if I should have heard a vehicle as it approached me."

"Do you know if any person was walking behind you, just prior to that time?"

"If there was such a person, I was unconscious of the fact."

"Are you absolutely positive that your last recollection was in Forty-seventh Street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues?"

"I am. My memory is entirely clear up to that point."

"Do you know where you were found by the officer who sent you to the hospital?"

"No, I have not asked. I have supposed, when I have thought about it, that I must have been found where I was stricken down—in Forty-seventh Street."

"You were found in Twenty-eighth Street, between Lexington and Third Avenues."

"Really? That is strange."

"It is; very strange."

"Are you positive that there was nothing behind you, man or vehicle, while you were passing through Forty-seventh Street?"

"I have no recollection of having noticed such a thing."

There was a tap at the door, and Joseph entered the room. He handed a sealed envelope to the detective—an envelope which bore the imprint of the headquarters of police. Nick tore away the flap and withdrew the report he had asked for. It had been late in reaching him, but it came in good time, nevertheless. There were twelve incidents reported of the character about which the detective had inquired, but only one proved to be of interest. It was as follows:

"At one-thirty-five a. m. of the night in question, Patrolman Mighels, on his beat, crossed Forty-seventh Street, at Broadway. In the street, a third of the distance toward Sixth Avenue, he saw two men lifting another man into an automobile. He ran toward them, but the car started away before he could get near enough to get the number or to describe the machine. It was a big car, and, he thinks, painted green."

CHAPTER VIII.

NAILING A DEEP CONSPIRACY.

When Joseph had gone from the room, Nick Carter was silent for a moment. Then he crossed the floor until he stood directly in front of his client; and he said, extending his hand:

"Mr. James Paul Westervelt, until this last conversation we have had together, in fact, until Joseph just now entered the room bringing me this note from police headquarters, I must confess to you that I have had doubts in my mind regarding you—I do not mean that I doubted your sincerity, exactly, but I have doubted the correctness of your contention. But now

I have none at all. I am entirely satisfied that you are the real James Paul Westervelt.

"You see," he added, after another short pause, during which Westervelt also was silent, "there has been nothing in what you have said until this last interview which might not have grown out of your imagination; and there has been nothing, even during this last interview—almost nothing—which a clever scoundrel who had long been preparing for such a time and circumstance might not have accomplished.

"When I was at the hospital, or, rather, as soon as I came away from it, I made a request at headquarters for certain information. That information is here"—he tapped the letter he held in his hand—"and it clinches everything. I am no longer in doubt."

"I am very glad of that, indeed," said Westervelt simply. "I confess that there have been times when I have almost doubted myself; when I have wondered if I had really recovered my senses and my memory, or if I were laboring under a hallucination."

"The thing now is to establish your claim," said the detective, as if he had not heard the remark of his companion. "How are we to prove that the man in your house is not Westervelt, and that you *are* he?"

"I am afraid, Mr. Carter, that I must leave that part of it entirely to you."

The detective made an emphatic nod.

"By all means," he said quickly.

"The whole thing smacks of some sort of a conspiracy, doesn't it?" asked the client. "It could not all have been the result of accident, could it?"

"Yes, to your first question; certainly not, to the second one. There is a conspiracy, but who is it who has conspired? The law says that three or more are required to enter into a conspiracy."

"I believe so."

"We have two, possibly, in the two men whom Officer Mighels discovered when they were in the act of lifting your unconscious body into the automobile. Oh, I forgot. Read this letter and you will understand. But who is the third conspirator?"

Westervelt shook his head.

"Do you suppose," asked Nick, "from your personal knowledge of the woman, do you suppose that your cousin, Mrs. Price, could concern herself in a matter of this sort? Do you suppose that the animosity she feels toward you could carry her so far as that?"

"I haven't a doubt that she is capable of it, but I doubt her ability to carry it off."

"And if another person—this man who has stolen your name and position—supplied the ability?"

"I haven't a doubt that she could have been argued into becoming a willing party to it, Mr. Carter—always provided that she was made to believe in its success. But, if you will permit me——"

"Go on. State whatever occurs to you."

"If it *is* a conspiracy, or even the carrying out of a well-laid plan, I can't understand why they did not do away with me entirely, instead of leaving me somewhere in the street, to be picked up, carried to a hospital, and ultimately made well again. Why didn't they kill me outright?"

"That is easily answered. There is not the slightest doubt that they thought they had done that very thing."

"You believe that?"

"I am sure of it."

"Please tell me exactly what you do think about it. Possibly, when I know what you are considering, I will be able to help you—a little."

"If my estimate of the case, now, is correct," said the detective, speaking slowly, and apparently selecting his words with care, "you had been carefully watched and followed, all that day after you left your own house; possibly such had been the condition of things for many days prior to that one. It was only an opportunity that was lacking, before that particular night."

Westervelt bowed acquiescence.

"You gave them the opportunity by walking through that almost deserted street alone, at that hour of the night, and by turning slantingly across it, as you say you did, at exactly the right spot for their purposes."

"You mean that you think I had been followed all that day and evening by persons in an automobile?"

"All that evening, certainly—if my theories, adopted during the last few minutes, are the correct ones."

"But——"

"What was done might easily have been accomplished with a steam automobile and an expert driver. One can be driven over a smooth pavement like that as silently as a shadow. The car could have been less than a hundred feet behind you, without warning you of its nearness by any noise it would make."

"I did not know."

"Try it some time and you will know. If it is true that such was the case, and I am more than half positive of it now, you offered the very opportunity that was sought, when you stepped from the curb into the roadway, and started to cross the street. The driver of the car had only to push the throttle open with his thumb, and the big machine would strike

you like a projectile from a catapult; and that is what happened."

"But why was I lifted into the car? Why was I not left there, where they struck me?"

"There are many reasons, but three will be sufficient."

"Well?"

"Neither of those two men could be certain that they were not observed when the car hit you, and the quickest and best way to avoid the consequences of such a possibility was to convey you with all speed to another part of the city."

"That is one reason."

"Yes; another one is: It was necessary to deprive you of all means of identification, when your body should be found."

Westervelt shuddered, as well he might have done.

"The third reason to which I had reference was that they wished to be quite sure that you were dead."

"But I was not dead."

"No; but doubtless you looked the part. From the description of you given to me to-day by the officer who found you in Twenty-eighth Street, you looked to be dead. I think that the assailants had no doubt that you were done for. I think, also, that they intended throwing you into the river, but that something happened to change their plans. They dropped you in Twenty-eighth Street instead, and then dragged you into the areaway where you were found."

"It is terrible to contemplate, Mr. Carter."

"They took everything from you by which you might be identified; your collar, tie, scarf pin, cuffs and links, handkerchief, watch and chain, money, letters, papers—say, could that man of yours whom you call Patrick Carr have been a party to this affair?"

"No, no! I could never believe that of Carr."

"Who, besides Carr and yourself, in your house, could have known that the shirt you put on that morning was one of the new ones that had just been sent home?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I recall the fact that your shirt was not removed by those villains because they were aware of the fact that *it bore no laundry identification mark.*"

"I understand you now. Any person in the house might have discovered that I had worn one of the new shirts, by investigating, after I had left the house. But what about my face? My features are well known in the city."

"Your features were so battered and bruised, so swollen and discolored, as to be unrecognizable, according to the report of the policeman I questioned. They counted on that; and—if others had half identified you at the morgue—and here is a further proof that the conspiracy centres in your own home—the fiends were prepared to visit the morgue and to discredit and deny the identification. Oh, that part of it was easy. It was known to them, also, that the suit of clothes you wore was not made in this country. Again the search takes you near to your own home, Mr. Westervelt."

"It is terrible; terrible."

"Now, let us see what we have at hand that will prove to us who the persons are who may be identified with the conspiracy; and afterward, let us see in what manner we can convince others of what we will know to be the facts."

"That last will be the hardest part of all."

"Most certainly. If that man up there is fool enough to wear your scarf pin, it will be his conviction so far as *we* are concerned; but it will not convince others, because he will already have manufactured a method to lie himself out of such a predicament. Then, there are the jewels you purchased at Tiffany's."

"I was thinking of them, Mr. Carter; but the man would know who they were for, by the initials, and——"

"Do you believe that any man could play your part, within that house, sufficiently well to deceive Mrs. Price—literally to deceive her, I mean?"

"No; I do not."

"And Cora?"

"I know that Cora could not be deceived by such a person. I *know* it!"

"Are you equally positive that she could not be inveigled or argued into a conspiracy against you?"

"I am more than positive."

"Neither of them were at home, when you went there to dine that evening?"

"No."

"Well, when we can establish what I now believe to be a fact, under the circumstances, that Cora Price was prevented from returning to your home that night, and that she has not since then seen the man who has taken your place within it, I will believe two important items."

"What are they, Mr. Carter?"

"I will be made to believe that Cora had no part or place in this affair, and for the very same reasons, I will be convinced that her mother *did* have both part and place in them and with them. And now, Mr. Westervelt, make yourself entirely at home here. You

are my guest. Joseph will show you to your room whenever you are ready for it. I shall not see you again till to-morrow. Read, sleep, smoke, rest up—do whatever pleases you, only don't go out of the house again without my knowledge."

CHAPTER IX.

IDA MAKES A REPORT.

At ten o'clock that same night Nick Carter stood within a deep shadow, directly opposite the Westervelt mansion. He was watching the lighted windows of the second floor, and he was wondering if Ida Jones had succeeded in gaining admittance to the house.

He did not know—he could not know—that fate had played directly into her hands, and so, into his own.

During his vigil, which had already lasted half an hour or more, he had fancied two or three times that he recognized the outlines of Ida's figure in shadow against the drawn shades; but he was not certain.

Twice, since he arrived there, he had felt, and he had resisted it each time, the impulse to cross the avenue, ring the bell, and ask for her; but he was not sure that she would have gone there under her own name—and he had forgotten to speak with her on the subject at the time she received her orders. He had had no idea that developments would follow so rapidly as they had done.

At last, at half-past ten, he turned away and walked rapidly homeward—to find, when he arrived, that Chick was awaiting him, and that there was also a message from Ida which a boy had delivered soon after he went out after his interview with Westervelt. He read the message at once. It said:

"I have been more successful than I dared to hope. The woman arrived home from abroad to-day. I was just in time. The daughter is not here. If you will be at the corner below the house to-morrow morning between six and seven I will try to steal outside long enough to see you. No time to write more, now.

"IDA."

"She's a trump," said Nick, aloud.

"Who? Ida? Sure," Chick replied.

"Well, Chick, what have you accomplished? Where is Patsy?"

"He's on the job. I came in to report."

"Go ahead, then."

"There isn't much to say—yet."

"I suppose not."

"I have uncovered two rather remarkable things about the man Westervelt, however. If you had had time to tell me just what you wanted to know——"

"Cut that, Chick, and tell me what you do know about what I did ask you to do. That is all that is necessary, at present."

"Well, the man has developed two habits during the past six months which are not at all like him, according to the acquaintances of his I have talked with."

"What are they?"

"One is, a freak of foppishness."

"A—*what?*"

"A desire for dress; a love for fashion—of the extreme sort; a different suit of clothes every day, or words to that effect. Before that time he was known to be somewhat careless of his personal appearance, in everything save cleanliness and in wearing garments that fitted him. Now, he has gone to the other extreme."

"What is the other habit to which you referred?"

"Forgetfulness."

"Eh? What sort of forgetfulness?"

"Forgetfulness of his friends. He passes them on the streets and meets them in the clubs without remembering to bow to them; but he is getting over that, to a degree, although the other habit seems to grow upon him, rather than to diminish."

Nick nodded; then he smiled. Presently, he said:

"Several things have happened to-day to convince me of the very facts which I sent you and Patsy out to find; but others must be convinced, as well. I'll tell you the story, now; and you may repeat it to Patsy. When you have heard it, get back on your job and follow up every trail which will clinch the changes you discover. I have got to have evidence that will convince a judge and a jury."

The detective began then at the beginning, and told the entire story to his first assistant. In conclusion, he said:

"I have made up my mind what I will do, now; partly it depends upon what Ida will have to say to me to-morrow morning; but I want you and Patsy to report here together at ten o'clock to-morrow night. In the meantime, get all the information you can. Remember, I want proof of everything you will have to tell me. Don't forget about the servants, but don't bother to tell me about them now. That can wait."

The following morning, exactly at six o'clock, Nick Carter jumped down from the driver's seat of a coupé,

at the corner of the avenue and street just below the Westervelt mansion. He was dressed in livery, and he thoroughly looked the part of coachman for a family that was rich enough to keep a coupé, if not a carriage.

For several minutes he busied himself about the harness, as if something were wrong with it and he had halted there to make repairs or corrections; and while he was still thus engaged, a maid, white-aproned and otherwise looking the part, tripped lightly down the avenue, and stopped near to him.

The maid was Ida Jones, of course.

"Step inside the coupé," said Nick, without looking up. "Close the door after you; the window is down. Partly draw the curtains; then we can talk."

She did as directed, and a moment later the detective took his attention away from the harness, moved over, and stood near the door of the coupé, where he could both hear, and be heard by, his clever assistant.

"I have only a very few moments in which to talk to you," she said, without awaiting his questions. "I will be as rapid and as concise as possible."

"Very well, Ida; go on. I'll do the listening; you do the talking."

"You know, when my health gave out for a time, and I did not work for you during several years, I did governess and companion work for the rich."

"Yes."

"Well, for a long time I served as companion to Mrs. Chester Forester, who lives next door to the Westervelt house. I recalled that fact when you bade me take up this present assignment. I figured that she could do more to get me into the house next door than all the city besides."

"A good idea."

"The Foresters' butler is a nice old man. He liked me when I was there; I knew that I could trust him; and so I took him into my confidence, told him what I wanted to do, and so, secured his coöperation."

"Good."

"He did not know if there was need of a new servant next door, but he went there himself to find out. He was gone only a few moments.

"'Just the very thing,' he said to me when he had returned. 'The lady, Mrs. Price, is due to arrive from abroad to-day'—that was yesterday—'and a maid is wanted for her. They were waiting until her return in order that she might make the selection herself, but on my recommendation'—and all that, you know."

"Yes."

"Well, I went there, and I got the place. I talked with the butler; I did not see the master of the house."

"Is the butler, by any chance, Tompkins?"

"No; there is not a servant in the house now who bears any one of the names you mentioned to me."

"Not even Patrick Carr?"

"No."

"Well?"

"I rode in the carriage with Mr. Westervelt to meet the steamer by which Mrs. Price arrived. I remained in the carriage while he went to find her, and so I did not witness the meeting between them. When they entered the carriage, the woman nodded to me, but she did not once speak to me all the way here; she barely spoke to him, in fact. When we were almost to the house, he asked Mrs. Price:

"'What about Cora?'

"'Oh, she is quite content to remain in Paris for another six months,' she replied.

"'Has she any idea why you wish her to remain there?' was the next question.

"'Certainly,' the woman replied, with one quick, sharp glance in my direction. 'She is quite well aware that I wish her to marry well, and that she can do it better there than here.' I could see that the woman was fencing, and that she resented the last question, with me in the carriage."

"I wish that you might have discovered the address of the young woman in Paris," said the detective.

"I have done so. It is written on this slip of paper," Ida responded; and she passed it beneath the curtain into the detective's hand.

"Good." He folded it and put it in his pocket. "I will have her in this city in a week. What more, Ida?"

"The woman barely paid any attention to me at all. I seemed to fill her requirements. When her trunks arrived at the house, I unpacked them and disposed of their contents."

"Did you see her jewels?"

"Certainly."

"Is there a pin among them—a star pin, I think it is—with the letter P outlined in diamonds and emeralds?"

"There is; and another one almost exactly like it, only the letter C, and the stones are diamonds and rubies."

"Splendid. By the way, did you happen to notice what sort of a scarf pin the man was wearing when

he went to the steamer to meet Mrs. Price. In fact——"

"Yes; I noticed it particularly, because it was a very peculiar one. It was——"

"Wait. Was it a bar of music which reads, 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot,' eh?"

"Precisely that."

"What has been the attitude of those two persons toward each other, at such times as you have had opportunity to notice them?"

"One of marked familiarity—intimacy, one might say. It was particularly so on one occasion when they did not know that I saw. Once, I heard her address him as Paul, and when he frowned at her, she corrected it to James. But Paul is the middle name, isn't it?"

"Yes; but the use of it is worthy of notice. Did you discover anything at all in regard to the old servants whom I asked you to inquire about?"

"One of them only—Tompkins, the former butler. It was the Foresters' butler who told me about him. Here is another slip of paper with his present address upon it."

"What about Carr, and the other servants?"

"Judkins knows nothing about him."

"What more, Ida?"

"I am afraid that there is nothing more—and I feel that I should return to the house now. Have you any further directions to make to me?

"No; only general ones, and you already have them. However, I wish you could find an opportunity to secure for me a specimen of Westervelt's handwriting. That is all."

CHAPTER X.

THE FINDING OF PATRICK CARR.

"I have found the car you wanted."

Such was the message which Nick Carter read from a postal card when he returned to his home after the interview with Ida Jones; and he knew that the car in question referred to Patrick Carr. That he was well pleased with the information, goes without saying.

On the way downtown, after his late interview, he had delivered the horse and coupé at the stable from which he had obtained it, and then had sent a long cable message to Paris, addressed to Mademoiselle Cora Price.

The message was admirably worded—and it was signed "Uncle Jim."

It told her that it was imperative that she should catch the first steamer home; that in the meantime she should not communicate with any person, not even with himself; and that upon her arrival she was not to go directly home, but to the Waldorf, whence she was to call a certain number on the telephone—Nick gave his own number, of course—and announce her arrival without delay.

The detective was convinced, since his talk with Ida, that Cora Price was not a party to any conspiracy that had been hatched, and he realized that her presence in proving the man now at the Westervelt home to be an impostor was imperative.

"Nothing of importance can be accomplished until she arrives," he told himself. "In the meantime I will gather the meshes of the net around that bunch so tightly that they won't be able to extricate themselves.

He wished that Patsy had included the address of Patrick Carr in that communication; and while he was wishing it, Patsy arrived at the house, accompanied by the man himself.

A typical house servant he was. It needed only a glance to assure one why he had remained so long a time in one position. Fidelity and kindliness were stamped upon his countenance.

The detective gestured the man to a seat opposite him, and began at once.

"Patrick, I am Nick Carter. You have heard of me?"

"Yes, sir; often."

"You were in the employ of Mr. Westervelt a long time, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why were you dismissed?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Who dismissed you?"

"The lady, sir; Mrs. Price."

"When were you dismissed?"

"Last Christmas day."

"Where was your master at that time?"

"I don't know, sir."

"When had you last seen him?"

"When he came home to dinner the evening before; and when he left the house again, after he had dined."

"You did not see him Christmas day, at all?"

"No, sir."

"Nor ever again after that?"

"I did not."

"How is it that you have not seen him on the street since then?"

"I am a house servant, sir; I am rarely on the streets; and besides, I have been away from the city, in a country house, a great deal of the time since then; but I had forgotten. I did see him once on the street, about two or three months ago."

"Did you speak to him?"

"I tried to do so. I confess that I was sore about the way I had been fired—discharged, I mean—without a recommendation, and I wanted to ask him about it. But he pretended that he didn't know me. He just waved me away from him."

"Were you quite sure that you *knew* him?"

"Yes, sir. It was he, all right, so far as looks went—but it wasn't a bit like him to act as he did. He had always been a kind man to me—to all the servants. He'd have spoiled some of them that I know."

"Undoubtedly. Do you remember laying out his clothes for him, the morning of the day before Christmas?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me what he wore at that time—underclothing and all."

"Some new underclothing, because it was heavier; he thought the lighter suits were not warm enough. Black socks, patent-leather laced shoes, also new. A batch of shirts had just been sent home to him, and I laid out one of those. A black tie with red stripes in it. His music scarf pin. A suit of clothes that he had purchased in London, in Bond Street. I was with him when he bought them. A derby hat, and——"

"That will suffice, thank you." The detective turned to Patsy. "Bring my client here," he directed, and a moment later the real Westervelt entered the room and paused just inside the door.

Nick was silent. All were silent. Carr stared at Westervelt, and Westervelt returned the gaze coolly, and without change of expression. Presently Carr slowly left his chair and got upon his feet, continuing the stare. He stood so for a moment, with his head thrust forward, his eyes fixed upon the face of the man before him. At last he spoke, thickly, heavily, as if he were unconscious of the fact that he uttered a sound.

"Speak, sir; speak to me," he said. "For God's sake speak, and tell me who you are."

By way of reply to that request, Westervelt did some superb acting. He yawned, stretched his arms over his head, and in a sleepy voice, replied:

"Good morning, Carr. What time is *it*?" It sounded as if Carr had just entered the room of a sleeping man to wake him. The effect of it was astounding.

Carr took two steps forward; he seized Westervelt's arm and almost shook him. He cried out:

"Who are you, sir? Who are you? What does this mean? You are—you are——"

"Is it possible that you do not recognize me, Carr?" Westervelt said, in an inimitable drawl.

For reply Carr seized Westervelt in his arms—but only for an instant; then he fell back away from his master, appalled by his own act of familiarity.

"Know you! Know you!" he cried out, unshed tears moistening his eyes. "Of course I do know you! But you are changed—so changed. Your hair is white, almost. But—but who—who is that other man? *Who is he?* Oh, sir, I was sure, all the time, that it was not you! But I did not dare even to whisper it to myself. But you are you. No person could deny that; at least, one who has known you as I have could not do so. What does it all mean, sir?"

The words had come so fast that there was no stemming the tide of them. They were impulsive, but they were unquestionably sincere.

If Nick Carter had needed any additional proof of the correctness of the position he had taken in the matter, he had it now.

"Carr," said the detective, "forget your master for a moment, and pay attention to me."

"Yes, sir." He turned toward the detective, thoroughly himself again.

"Are you employed at the present time, Carr?"

"Yes, sir. I have a good place; but not——"

"Never mind that. Can you secure a substitute, so that you can leave that position at once—to-day?"

"Yes, sir. I will leave it, if you bid me to do so."

"Very well, you shall have the balance of the day in which to resign and leave your present place of employment, and to return here, to this house, to your master."

"I will do it, sir."

"After that you will assist Mr. Garvin in his search for the other servants who were in the employ of Mr. Westervelt, the day before Christmas, last year."

"I know where they are now, sir; that is, all but one of them; and I suspect where she is."

"Which one is that, Carr?"

"Mary Holmes, the maid."

"Where do you think she can be found?"

"I read in the paper, long ago, that Mrs. Price, with her daughter and her maid, had gone to Europe. That is where I think Mary Holmes is now; with Mrs. Price and Miss Price, sir."

"And you know where all the others can be found?"

"Every one of them."

"Do you suppose that they are all loyal to Mr. Westervelt?"

"Yes, sir. There is no doubt of that. We all loved him—all except Mary Holmes. She was under the thumb of Mrs. Price. You will pardon me, Mr. Westervelt, but none of us liked that woman. It isn't proper of me to speak with such liberty, but it is the truth."

"That is what we want just now, Carr; the truth," said Nick. "You will conduct Mr. Garvin to each of those servants, one by one, will you?"

"Surely, sir."

"Now, another thing."

"Yes, sir."

"What time of day was it, on Christmas day, when you were dismissed by Mrs. Price?"

"In the morning; about half-past ten or eleven, I think it was."

"What excuse was given for your dismissal? What reason was there for the act?"

"None at all, sir. I was told to go. I was told that it was Mr. Westervelt's order, and that he was in the house at the time. I doubted that, for I had waited up for him, and had not seen or heard him coming in. But when I left the house, I turned and looked back at it, and I saw him—or thought I saw him—standing at the window of his private lounging room. That settled it. I thought then that he did know all about it."

"Have you seen the other servants who served in that house with you since then?"

"Yes, sir. Tompkins, often; the others, on and off, several times."

"Were all of them dismissed that same day?"

"Tompkins was. He was given a hundred dollars bonus, and told that the whole family was going abroad."

"And the others?"

"Were sent away during the day, in the same manner in which I was dismissed. Tompkins told me that he saw Mr. Westervelt through the open door to his rooms, but that there was no speech between them. Mrs. Grimes refused to leave without speaking with Mr. Westervelt, and she said that he finally went to her. She is ready to swear that it was not his natural voice that spoke to her."

"What did he say to her?"

"He said, 'Obey your mistress; you are not wanted here.' Then he turned away. Mrs. Grimes thought he was crazy. I guess they all had that idea; all but me. I thought that the woman had got some hold upon him which forced him to do her will; and yet I could not in the least understand it."

CHAPTER XI.

ARRANGING A PLOT.

During the ten days immediately following upon the scene just described, the detective busied himself in bringing to a focus every light which he had thus far been able to throw upon this puzzle of identities.

In reality he was only awaiting the arrival in New York of Cora Price, for he thoroughly believed that in her he would find the way to the easiest solution of all the problems; and events proved that he was not mistaken in that idea.

He had already mapped out a course which he intended to pursue to the end, when the young woman should have arrived. It was to be a heroic one, from any point of view that could be taken; and that it would be efficacious, and thoroughly so, he had not a doubt.

In deciding upon his future procedure, he made use of a familiar quotation with a few words interpolated within it—to do a great right, do what may appear to be a little wrong.

The situation he was obliged to face was a perplexing one. Possession is often nine big points of the law. He knew that; and the interloper now at the home of the Westervelts was certainly intrenched in possession of the name and place of the detective's client.

The man had established himself at the banks—three of them—where Westervelt had kept accounts; he had, supposedly, established himself at the several clubs—but it was found that he frequented those that had been little used by Westervelt himself, and shunned those where Westervelt had been more or less a familiar figure.

He had surrounded himself with new servants; and the old ones were supposed to be scattered hither and yon. There was no manner of doubt that he could rely upon the assistance of Mrs. Price in all that he had undertaken. He was possessed of the jewelry, the private papers, letters, and intimate prop-

erty of the man whose place and position he had stolen; he had surrounded himself with metaphorical breastworks which seemed, at a glance, to be impregnable.

But—he had *not* established himself with Westervelt's one-time political friends, and he presumably had not done so with Cora Price; it was certain that he had not accomplished it in the cases of the old servants of the household.

Yet, who would dare to assail his position, with only the evidence that the detective had thus far mastered? The law would presume that he was guiltless; it would impose the burden of proof upon the man who sought to oust him; and much of that proof was insufficient to satisfy a court and a jury.

Heroic measures were, therefore, imperative.

Nick Carter studied over this aspect of the case for a long time—and he finally decided what he would do. It was daring, but he believed it would be conclusive.

When the time drew near for the arrival of Cora Price, if she had heeded the summons to return, he kept Joseph on the watch near the telephone, and at last, in the forenoon of the tenth day after the cable was sent, the call came.

It so happened that the detective was in his study when the call came, and he replied to it himself. A melodious, girlish voice announced that Miss Price was at the Waldorf, and desired to speak to Mr. James Paul Westervelt at once—and Westervelt was summoned to the phone.

His voice had not changed, if other characteristics about him had done so. It was evident at once that Cora Price recognized it. He had been thoroughly posted by the detective as to what he should say in that telephonic interview, and the result of it was that Patrick Carr was presently dispatched to the Waldorf in a closed carriage, to bring Miss Price to Nick Carter's house.

The detective thought it best that there should be no witnesses to the first meeting between Westervelt and his ward, and therefore as soon as she arrived at the house she was shown into the library, where he was awaiting her alone; and the door was closed behind her.

It was half an hour later when Westervelt came out and called the detective; and Nick, followed by Chick and Patsy, entered the room.

Cora Price was pale, somewhat excited, and very eager.

She had heard the whole story from Westervelt, but she had not for an instant doubted his identity. The white hair, and the changes that had been wrought in the man, were nothing to her; they were merely on the surface, and she had looked deeper than that.

Concerning the identity of the man now in possession at the old home, she could not even conjecture; but she did know that for some time prior to the last Christmas her mother had made several mysterious trips to Brooklyn, and that she had received many letters, and written many which she had carefully guarded.

"Cora and I have agreed upon one thing, Mr. Carter," Westervelt told the detective. "We sincerely hope that you will view it in the light that we do."

"What is that?" asked Nick.

"We must not forget that Mrs. Price is Cora's mother; and," he added, with a flush on his pale face, "she will presently be my mother-in-law."

"I see," said the detective, smiling. "Well, I am glad, notwithstanding the objection you once mentioned to me."

"Cora has consented to overlook the discrepancy in years; she says that she did that long ago, if only I had been wise enough to see it."

"Well, what is the condition of this affair upon which you two are agreed?" Nick asked him.

"This: I want merely my name and possessions restored to me. I do not want Cora's mother punished for what she has undoubtedly been led to do; and if we do not punish her, we cannot very well punish the man. What do you say about it, Mr. Carter?"

"I say that we had best restore you to your name and your possessions before we take up the side issues of the case, Mr. Westervelt."

"But you won't send my mother to prison, Mr. Carter?" Cora said pleadingly.

"I doubt very much if she could be sent to prison for what she has done, or has helped to do, in this matter—with the evidence we shall be able to produce against her," replied the detective. "At best, she has doubtless been merely a cat's-paw. The thing is to put the man who stands beside you in possession of his own, and to do it with as little delay as possible."

"Yes, sir."

"You love him; you are willing and ready to stand by him and for him—and I think you had better leave the rest of the affair to me."

"I will do so, Mr. Carter. I think I understand you."

"I haven't a doubt of it. I will ask you two to amuse yourselves here in the library, after dinner this evening, until I call for you. When I do call for you, I wish you both to be ready, no matter how late the hour may be; and it won't be very early."

The detective, followed by his assistants, went to the study after that interview. Nick seated himself at his desk, and wrote as follows, to Ida Jones:

"This will be the night for action. All the evidence you have collected, while you have been in that house, will, or rather may, be made use of to-morrow. Here are your instructions for to-night. Follow them literally.

"Provide yourself during the day with some chloroform, and with several powders for which I inclose a doctor's prescription. During the evening, as late as possible, manage somehow to get one of the powders into the butler, and also into any other servant who may be likely to be wakeful, or in the way. The powders dissolve quickly, and are tasteless, as well as harmless; but they will induce sleep within an hour after taking. If it is possible to administer the powders to the pseudo Westervelt, and to Mrs. Price, instead of the chloroform, do so; otherwise, use the chloroform after they have retired, either by spraying it into the rooms or as you can. At midnight, or as soon after that as it can be done in safety, open the front door to admit me. I will be at the opposite side of the avenue with Chick and Patsy. Strike a match when you appear at the doorway; it will be the signal for me."

He gave the communication to Patsy to deliver, directing him to go straight to the residence with it; but he took it back again, and added a line, which read:

"Use this note as a pretext for leaving the house long enough to visit a drug store."

"What is the game, Nick?" asked Chick, who had not yet been informed.

"You will understand it, presently, when you have received your instructions," was the reply.

"Very well, I am ready for them."

Nick turned to his desk again, and wrote a number of short letters, passing each one to his assistant, as he completed them. They were addressed, respectively, to the following persons:

To the officer who discovered the insensible body of Westervelt, in Twenty-eighth Street, at four o'clock Christmas morning; to Officer Mighels, who witnessed the episode of the automobile, in Forty-seventh Street; to two of the doctors and one of the nurses at the hospital where Westervelt was taken at that time; to the cashier and the paying teller of the National Midland Bank; to Mr. Webb, at Tiffany's; to Mike Creighton; to Dan O'Leary.

Each of the notes earnestly requested the person who received it to call at the residence of James Paul Westervelt at noon of the following day, and added that an explanation of the invitation would be supplied by Mr. Chickering Carter, who would deliver it in person.

"What am I to say to all these people?" Chick asked, when the writing of the notes was done with.

"You are to tell them, if necessary, the whole story, from beginning to end; only make them promise to be there, and to be on time—and bind them to secrecy about all of it. You can do it. I have already asked headquarters to order the two patrolmen to go there, but I prefer that they should receive the requests first. You have got your hands full, between now and night, to deliver all those messages, and to secure all the consents. I don't want a single failure, Chick."

"I'll have them there if I have to go after them and take them," said Chick, smiling.

"I don't want that, either. I wish it all to be done willingly."

"I think I can manage it."

"And I am sure that you can. Get about it now."

"Won't you tell me what the game is, Nick?"

"No. I would rather have you get it as the others will."

When Chick was gone, Nick descended to the library again, but before entering the room he told Joseph to call Carr, and to have him there when he should come out of the library.

"Miss Price," he said, when he entered the room, "I neglected to ask you about Mary Holmes. Where is she?"

"I don't know. Somewhere in Paris. She left me, and was married to some Frenchman, the day after my mother left me."

"That is all; thank you," said Nick; and he went out into the hall. "Carr," he said to the servant, who was awaiting him, "get busy now. I want you to find every one of those old servants, and to take them, in a body, to Mr. Westervelt's house at seven o'clock to-morrow morning—without fail. Will you do it? Will you promise to have all of them there at that time, Carr?"

"Yes, sir; I will," was the reply.

CHAPTER XII.

DESPERATE REMEDIES.

At twelve-thirty o'clock that night the front door of the Westervelt house opened slowly, and a woman peered out from it cautiously. The woman was Ida Jones.

A moment later she struck a match and permitted the flame of it to burn brightly for half a second; then it was extinguished.

An instant later, three figures stole from the shadow of the trees along the park wall, and crossed the avenue rapidly. They entered through the open doorway of the house without a word being spoken.

The great front door was closed silently behind them, a button in the wall was pressed, there was a sharp click, and the wide hallway was flooded with light. Nick Carter, Chick, and Patsy stood there, facing Ida Jones.

"Well?" said the detective.

"Everything has been done as you directed," Ida replied to him.

"Good. Patsy, step outside again and tell Danny to bring the car to the door. Then make a run for it to the corner of Madison Avenue. You will find a police patrol wagon waiting there. A lieutenant will be in charge of it. Tell him that Nick Carter is ready. He will know exactly what to do. When you have done that, return to this door and stand on guard, prepared to reply to any questions that may be asked by a chance passer-by. Now, Ida, where is Westervelt's room?"

"I will show you," she replied. "Come."

"Is he undressed? Is he in bed?"

"No; he dropped asleep on a couch in his room, with his clothes on. The powder worked quickly in his case."

"All the better. But you need not guide me to the room. I can find it. In a moment more there will be four policemen here. I want you to admit them, and to guide them to the servants' rooms. That is all you will have to do about it. The policemen know what is expected of them."

"Very well."

"Chick and I will take away the man who calls himself James Paul Westervelt. You will remain here in the house until I return. Sit at one of the front windows until you see my car stop before the door. Come, Chick."

They ascended the stairs together; they entered a lighted room where a man was stretched upon a couch sleeping. They looked down upon him. In feature and in form he was almost precisely like the real Westervelt; or, rather, like what he had been before the accident—and yet there was a difference. It could be seen in the expression more than in the features. They were as alike as the Czar of Russia and the present Prince of Wales.

But the two detectives did not wait long. They lifted the man from the couch and bore him out of the room and down the stairs. In the hallway below, they encountered the policemen entering; but no word was spoken between them. Nick and Chick carried their burden to the waiting car, and Danny drove them rapidly away from the house. Patsy remained on guard.

After a little, the policemen began to appear again, two at a time usually, each time accompanied by one of the protesting servants, who could not understand why they had been awakened from sleep to be carted off to a station house. One—the butler—had to be carried out. He, too, had been drugged.

Half an hour later the automobile drove to the door again. This time it contained the real Westervelt,

Cora Price, and Nick Carter. They entered the house, and soon afterward the detective came out of it again. Patsy entered the car with him, and they drove away —home.

"The plan has worked out beautifully," said Nick, as they drove homeward. "In the morning, about ten o'clock, that interloper will awake. He may or may not miss his scarf pin; it doesn't matter. Don't talk to him, or reply to questions from him. At twelve o'clock turn him loose. He will go directly to what he now calls his home. He will find a strange reception awaiting him."

* * * * * * *

When Mrs. Price rang her bell, just before ten in the morning, Ida answered it. She did not wait to hear what the woman might have to say, but exclaimed with a smile:

"I have good news for you, Mrs. Price. Your daughter returned last night. I thought——"

The woman stared, as if not comprehending.

"Cora here? Has she—has she seen Mr. Westervelt yet?"

"No, madam."

"Help me to dress," the woman ordered, starting from her bed; and never was such haste made by a woman in getting into her clothes.

"You will find your daughter in the breakfast room," said Ida, when the feat was accomplished; and the woman, scarcely hearing, ran down the stairs and into the designated room; but she came to a stop just inside the door, gasped out an incoherent word or two, and then collapsed on the floor. The real Westervelt was seated at the table, facing her as she entered; her daughter was opposite him, and also turned to face her. When she opened her eyes again she was hysterical, and the hysteria soon developed into a fever. Cora finally took her mother to her room and remained with her a long time. What was said during that time is not known—but Mrs. Price did not appear again that day.

Nick Carter's clever strategy had placed the rightful owner in possession of his own; the nine points of law were now working on the side of the real Westervelt.

Shortly after ten o'clock the detective arrived at the house. He heard Ida's report of what had happened there that morning, and nodded his head, well satisfied. Patrick Carr, accompanied by the full staff of the old servants, had arrived at the hour appointed for them, and every detail of the detective's plan was working out perfectly. Tompkins had resumed his old place as if he had not been away from it, and the others had fallen naturally into theirs.

At eleven-forty-five the doorbell began to ring, and the invited guests began to make their appearances; by a quarter past twelve they were all there, without an exception.

The detective assembled them in the great dining room of the mansion, and standing before them, told in detail every phase of the case since the moment when Westervelt first appeared at his house after his discharge from the hospital. Westervelt was seated at his right, and Cora Price was next to him; and the others listened with wonder, not unmixed with awe. The bank officials stirred uneasily as the tale progressed, until Nick assured them that the banks would not be held accountable for what the interloper had done in Mr. Westervelt's absence. Then they were content to listen to the rest of the tale unmoved.

The story, as Nick told it, was a long one. He went through every detail of the case with particularity, and it was nearly half-past twelve when he had finished.

And then, just as the guests were rising from their chairs, the doorbell pealed again, followed by a prearranged signal made by Danny upon the horn of the automobile.

"Please wait where you are," said the detective, and he hurried from the room. He was at the door when Carr opened it; Tompkins stood a few feet away.

The interloper entered quickly—and paused; the door closed behind him, and Carr stood with his back against it. It was evident that the man recognized Carr and Tompkins, and that he was metaphorically taken off his feet by the fact.

While he hesitated, Nick seized him by one arm, and hurried him along, willy-nilly, toward the great

dining room. He protested, but he had to go. There was a grip upon his arm which there was no resisting. In a moment more he was pushed into the presence of the assembled company.

For a moment, he stared, as if petrified. Then he passed one hand wearily across his eyes and sank upon a chair. Nick Carter jerked him to his feet again.

That act of Nick's seemed to bring the man to his senses again. He turned his eyes from face to face in that room; then he smiled; and then a door opened, and Westervelt himself strode forward toward him.

For a moment the two stood there, facing each other in silence. They were strangely alike, although pronounced differences could be noticed, now that they were together. It was Westervelt who spoke first.

"You were the man who approached me, once, after I had made a speech at a political meeting," he said calmly.

"Yes; I am that man," was the reply, delivered just as calmly.

"And you were the boy whom I met on a train once, coming from Buffalo to New York."

"Yes, I was that boy." The fellow still replied with entire calmness.

"You are related to me—how?"

"My father was your mother's third cousin. It isn't very close. I discovered some years ago that we were strangely alike, if I shaved off my beard and mustache. That was the root of the present evil. I ran you down in the street, not intending to injure you badly, but to put you in a private sanitarium—for the balance of your life. It was the proprietor of that sanitarium who was with me; but we thought we had killed you. We dropped you in Twenty-eighth Street. Doubtless you know the rest."

"Yes; I know it."

"I induced your cousin——"

"Stop. I know that part of the story also."

"What do you intend to do with me?" the man asked, with a quiet smile. "By the way, my name, if you should wish to make use of it, is Hawkins."

"I do not care to prosecute you. You may go, on two conditions."

"Indeed. Perhaps I may not care to accept them. What are they?"

"One is that you leave the country at once, never to return to it. The other is that you sign, in the presence of this company, a full confession which is already written out for you. If you break your word, and do return to this country, you will be prosecuted on that confession."

Hawkins chuckled. "Suppose I should refuse?" he asked impudently.

"In that case you shall go from this room straight to the Tombs, and from there to prison on charges which will keep you there indefinitely."

"In that case, I accept," was the mocking reply.

Five minutes later, when he was about to leave the room, he turned and said:

"Possibly, Cousin Westervelt, if you should ever travel abroad, we may not yet have seen the last of each other." Then he passed out of the room and from the house, and was gone.

"That was wonderful work, Mr. Carter," said Westervelt, after the luncheon had been served to the company. "I feel as though money could not repay you for what you have done for me."

"Then don't attempt it, my friend," replied the detective.

"But what can I do to show my gratitude?"

"You can take my advice, and drop politics," was the smiling reply."

THE END.

A word about the tale you will get in the next issue (No. 687). The author of it had this to say when he laid the manuscript on the editor's desk: "There; you've got one of the best stories I've ever written." The man who made this remark ought to know, and certainly he has made no mistake this time. For, after reading it, the editor is able not only to back up his opinion, but to say that he stated the case much too mildly. The story is simply a record maker from start to finish. It is called "The Westervelt Option; or, Nick Carter on a Puzzling Trail." Get it, by all means, everybody, for it is the sort you are sure to like.

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HOW DADDY WON A HOME.

"CHEER up, daddy!" said Warden Willett kindly. "There's no call for you to be so downhearted; you'll be out of jail in less than three months."

Old Oakes straightened his bent shoulders.

"And what good's that to me, Mr. Willett?" he exclaimed with unaccustomed vehemence. "What good'll it do me? I don't want to get out."

"Don't want to get out!" exclaimed the warden, looking as if he could not believe his ears. "Don't want to leave Moorlands, and get back again to your home and friends?"

Oakes shook his head.

"I haven't got no home but that," he said sadly, jerking his thumb backward toward the hollow in the hillside where the grim, gray granite buildings which made up Moorlands prison were outlined against the dull green of the larch plantations behind them.

Willett was not a young man, but he had only recently come to Moorlands jail. He stared in hopeless puzzlement. A convict who did not want to leave prison was something quite outside his experience. Every convict he had ever had anything to do with had lived for the day he could leave prison, and more than one of them had taken totally illegal methods of advancing the day of their release.

Willett was a kindly hearted man, and there was something about the worn, old, gray-haired convict beside him which appealed strongly to such softness as long dealing with the scum of humanity had left him. Oakes, he knew, had been in and out of prison—mostly in—for nearly thirty years past. Inside prison walls, safe from his besetting temptation to lay hands on other people's property, he was a model of good conduct, and there had never been his match in Moorlands as a shepherd.

It was his complete trustworthiness which had gained for the old fellow a degree of liberty beyond that allowed to any other inmate of the prison.

"But surely you've got relations?" said Willett. "Some one who'd make a home for you?"

A curious expression crossed the old man's face.

"No one," he replied.

"But you've been married, daddy; you told me so yourself. Haven't you any children?"

The warden's interest was so evident that Oakes' lined face softened.

"Ay, I've got a daughter, Mr. Willett. A good girl she was, and married well. Her husband's a farmer, and lives down in these parts."

"Well," said Willett, "wouldn't she look after you?"

Oakes looked up sharply.

"Surely ye don't think that bad of me, Mr. Willett!" he exclaimed. "The likes of me to go to her an' disgrace her an' her husband before their neighbors? Thanks be, she reckons I'm dead, an' all I hopes is she'll never know I'm not!"

He paused as if ashamed of his vehemence; then, before Willett could find words to reply:

"Ye won't let out as I told ye this much?" he begged.

"That I won't," cried Willett; "an', by thunder, I wish there was more had your notions, daddy. I tell you, straight, there's mighty few would think the way you do. But what are you going to do when your time's up?"

"You'll see me back again pretty soon, sir," said daddy with a thin smile. "It ain't a bit o' good my trying to keep straight outside. There ain't two ways about it. When I'm here I'm right enough, but outside I can't run straight to save me."

"Seems a sad pity," said Willett, half to himself. "Moorlands ain't a cheerful place to end one's days in."

"It's a sight better than the workhouse," declared the old man. "The grub's none so bad, and when I'm along of my sheep I'm happy enough. I tell you straight if they'd let me have an ounce or so of baccy a week, I'd not ask anything better than to stick here till I die."

As he spoke they reached the gate of the Leat meadow, where a number of sheep were grazing, and Oakes opened it. Willett stopped.

"There's no hurry about moving this flock, daddy. You go in and count them, while I walk up to the bailiff's cottage and get that tar."

Strictly speaking, Willett was breaking the rules. A convict is not supposed to be out of a warden's sight for so much as a single second, unless he is locked in his cell. But daddy was beyond rules; never in all his prison life had he broken one. As for his running away, Willett or any other warden would have been less surprised if the prison itself had taken wings and departed across the tors.

Sheep are not so trustworthy as a man like Oakes. When they get bored with one field, they are apt to go over the wall into the next. Hence the necessity for counting them occasionally.

Daddy was busy at his task when he was startled by the sound of galloping hoofs. He looked round. Here came a man riding for all he was worth along the highroad, which runs for nearly three miles through the prison farm.

"My word, he's in a hurry!" muttered the old man, as he noticed the white foam on the horse's bit, and its flanks black with sweat. "Wonder what's up?"

The field where Oakes was working was near the north-west corner of the farm, where the road takes a sharp right-hand turn to Ashampton. There is a footpath across the two end fields, which saves a quarter of a mile and a sharp hill. Dry stone walls surround the fields, and the entrance to the short cut is by a stone stile, easy enough to cross afoot, but uncommonly awkward for a horse to tackle.

To clear it the horse must make a clean jump of at least four feet. The stones are big, and there is no give as in a hedge or earthen bank.

As he came near this stile the rider turned his horse to the right.

"Crikey, but he's going to tackle it!" exclaimed Oakes in surprise, for the horse was a heavy-looking, farmer's gig horse, and seemed anything but a jumper.

It rose pluckily, but the height was too much for it. Oakes heard the sharp ring of metal on stone as its iron shoes struck the topmost stone; then, with a heavy thud, the ani-

mal crashed onto the short turf, flinging its rider far over its head.

As Oakes ran up as fast as his stiff old legs would carry him, he saw the horse scramble to its feet and stand there blowing hard, but seemingly none the worse for its tumble. The man lay where he had fallen, flat on his face.

Oakes turned him over. He was a young fellow of perhaps twenty, seemingly a farm laborer. He was breathing thickly, but was not cut, nor did any of his bones seem to be broken.

"Stunned, that's all, I reckon," said Oakes aloud. "Wonder what he was in such a mighty hurry about?"

Then his eyes fell on a letter on the grass. It had evidently fallen from the man's pocket. The old convict picked it up.

It was addressed, "Doctor Venn, Burley House, Ashampton." The writing bore signs of desperate haste, and the envelope was not sealed.

"Going to fetch the doctor, that's what he was," muttered Oakes. "Wonder who's wanting him that bad? I'll just see; maybe Willett could send some one."

He pulled the letter out of the envelope. On a half sheet of note paper were scrawled the following words:

"My wife's had a terrible fall, and is bleeding awful. For God's sake, come quick. Yours obediently,

"THOMAS TRINWORTH,
"Crockton Farm."

Daddy's weather-burned face went sickly white; his legs shook so that he nearly fell.

"My daughter!" were the two words which burst from his quivering lips.

* * * * * * *

For perhaps fifteen seconds the old man stood there, the picture of shivering helplessness. Then the fit passed. He thrust the note into the one pocket which is all a convict is allowed, he caught the horse by the bridle, hastily scrambled into the saddle, and, without so much as a glance at the man on the ground, drove his heels into the animal's sides, and sent it off at full gallop toward the gate on the far side of the field.

This gate was closed, but daddy was down and up again with the quickness of a youth. Two minutes more and the horse's hoofs rang on the granite highroad.

The sound brought Willett out of the overseer's cottage, just in time to see Oakes gallop out of sight down the hill which drops steeply to Meriton Brook. The warden gave one gasp of amazement, then almost instinctively seized his carbine and rapidly fired twice into the air.

There were five miles of lonely road between the edge of the prison farm and Ashampton. Daddy had covered fully half the distance before his mind, stunned by the shock of his daughter's disaster, began to work at all. What roused him from his trance was a yell. A moorman rounding up ponies on a tor above the road had suddenly caught sight of him, and, with a shout, had turned his pony and was galloping in pursuit. The civilian who catches an escaped convict earns a five-pound reward.

Daddy glanced back. His pursuer was a big man, while his mount was but a thirteen-hand pony.

"Ha, he'll never catch me!" he muttered. But all the same, he kicked his own horse to a still harder gallop.

He was right. The moorman fell behind. But now it came to daddy that, as he neared the town, he would meet more people. What would happen? Could he get through?

"Hang it, I'll have to," he muttered, with unaccustomed fierceness.

He was on the top of Carne Hill now. Below, in the valley, he could see the gray spire of Ashampton church rising above the beech trees. Another half a mile, and he was off the moor and galloping downhill between high hedges.

A shout again. A roadman had sprung up from his stone heap, and, rushing across the road, made a snatch at the bridle. He missed it, and reeled back against the bank.

But a farmer, jogging along in his tax cart farther down the hill, had heard the outcry. He looked round, and, catching sight of the convict, instantly swung his horse broadside across the road, blocking it all but a yard or two.

Daddy never checked. On he came like a clattering whirlwind. The shoulder of his big horse met the shoulder of the trap horse, and over went horse, trap, farmer, and all, crash in the dusty road. The shock flung the old man onto the withers of his steed, but he scrambled back into the saddle and pounded on downhill at the same mad speed. There were cottages and a smithy at the foot. People rushed out, shrieking and gesticulating, but daddy swept through them.

On along a mile of level road, with thick timber to the left and right, and not another soul did he see until he came hammering down the last bit of steep to the bridge leading over the Ashe.

Here were a dozen boys from the grammar school. A moment they stared amazed. Then, with a "W-whoop!" they rushed in pursuit.

Daddy hardly saw them. There was room in his mind for one thought only. To deliver his letter. And Burley House was now barely a quarter of a mile away. He knew where it stood. He had been in Ashampton more than once before.

Next moment the quiet little country town was treated to the amazing spectacle of a runaway convict galloping top speed up the High Street.

The inhabitants poured out like bees. Every second the chase grew. A roaring mob streamed like a torrent behind daddy's horse. The policeman standing by the market corner heard the roar, spun round, and, after one gasp of astonishment, made a gallant rush at the horse's head. But he was not young, and his waist belt was many inches longer than it had been on the day when he first donned the blue. He was a second too late.

Now the street ran steeply upward to the residential quarter. Daddy's mount was failing. He himself was so giddy from the rush through the air that houses and people were all one blur.

There was a livery stable to the left. As daddy pounded by a young groom, who had just saddled a horse for a customer, saw him, sprang onto the horse, and galloped out after him. The runners saw, and a loud shout went up.

"Hi, stop!" cried the groom, as his horse gained hand over fist. He would be alongside in a moment, but now the green gate of Burley House was in sight, a bare fifty yards away on the right.

With a final kick and a wrench of the right-hand rein, daddy pulled his beast clear onto the pavement, and his pursuer shot by. The pavement was greasy. Daddy's horse, dead beat, slipped and came down with a crash, flinging him heavily onto the flags.

There was a stabbing pain in his side as he staggered up, but somehow he reached the gate, flung it open, and scuttled up the drive like a wounded rabbit making for its burrow.

The yelling mob was at his heels, but he got to the front door a few yards ahead of the first and tore at the bell. The noise had been heard inside. It was the doctor himself who opened the door. Daddy thrust the note into his hand, and then the first of the mob seized him, and down he went for a second time with his gnarled old hands stretched out toward the doctor's feet.

* * * * * * * *

"Here's a visitor for you, Oakes."

Daddy, who had spent long misty days lying with two broken ribs in the quiet comfort of the prison infirmary, opened his tired eyes, and saw standing by his bed the tall, upright form of the governor, Colonel Peyton.

"A visitor, sir?" he muttered in feeble amazement. In all

his years in prison no visitor had ever asked for the old shepherd.

A sturdy man in tweeds and gaiters, with a weather-tanned, embarrassed face, stepped forward, and stretched out a huge hand. Daddy took it wonderingly.

"My name's Trinworth," said the newcomer. "Thomas Trinworth—him as married your daughter."

An expression of dismay crossed daddy's face.

"I didn't want for him to know," he said, looking at Colonel Peyton.

"I think he's glad to know," replied the governor quietly.

"That I be," declared the other stoutly. "An' so's Amy. What I come to say is this, Mr. Oakes. You saved her life by getting the doctor as smart as you did, and she and I both says when you gets out o' here, as we wants you to come an' live along with us."

Daddy hesitated. The thought of a home to end his days in was sweet, but he felt it was impossible.

"I couldn't do it," he said at last. "'Twouldn't be right."

"Why not?" asked Trinworth.

"The likes o' me?" said daddy. "'Twould bring disgrace on you."

The farmer laughed.

"Disgrace, indeed! Is that what you thinks? Why, the neighbors'll think it an honor. They all says as what you did was the pluckiest bit o' work they ever knew of. You must come."

And daddy went.

ADVENTURE IN THE BALKANS.

ALTHOUGH the Balkans can boast of cities which are miniatures of London and Paris, declares Mr. Harry De Windt, the author of "Through Savage Europe," the remoter districts are, as of old, hot-beds of outlawry and brigandage. Through them you must travel with a revolver in each pocket and your life in your hand, and of this fact Mr. De Windt had unpleasant proof.

In the district called Ropitza an elderly Turk urged us to pass the night at a squalid inn where our driver had taken us. Failing to persuade us, the old villain disappeared, and so effectively plied our driver with *sliwowitz* that he could not sit up on the box until sunset. It was therefore dark before we could set out, along a narrow road hewn through dense pine forest.

But the game little team dashed along, and must have covered about a mile, when there came a violent lurch, followed by a crash, and I found myself in the dusty road within an inch or so of unpleasantly active iron heels. The driver had been hurled by the shock clean over his horses' heads, and lay motionless.

Fortunately, my companion, like myself, was uninjured, and we set to work to repair the damage and assist the plunging and terrified ponies to regain their legs.

A pine tree which had fallen across the track was the cause of the disaster, but the carriage was luckily intact, and only a trace was broken, which I hastened to repair with the aid of rope and a jackknife. Then a curious thing happened.

"Look behind you!" suddenly exclaimed my friend, and I turned hastily, to discover perhaps twenty silent, shadowy forms, which had apparently sprung out of the earth around us.

There was no "Your money or your life!" business about this strange band, but its methods were quite as effectual. "You will give us two hundred dinars"—about eight pounds—"and we will help you shift that tree," said the spokesman in Servian, and I instantly recognized the voice as one I had heard that afternoon in the inn.

Resistance was, of course, useless, for a match was kindled by the speaker ostensibly to light a cigarette, but probably to reveal the gleam of firearms in every man's belt.

The miscreants numbered more than twenty, we only three, and one of our number half stupefied with drink and terror.

There was nothing for it but to pay up and look pleasant, and having removed the barrier, obviously placed there by themselves, the robbers vanished as rapidly and silently as they had appeared on the scene.

CAT FOUGHT IN MID-AIR.

A CAT stands a pretty good chance in its battle with the world. It never feels called upon to sacrifice its comfort, it has a faculty of falling on its feet, it possesses the traditional nine lives to dispose of, and let it once face an enemy, woe betide the unlucky foe. There is a spirited little story which signally exemplifies all this.

"The chicken hawk of the West," says the narrator, "is a savage and dangerous enemy, but once one of these air pirates got worsted. I was sitting in front of the doctor's office when a hawk shot down with wonderful rapidity of wing, so fast that its shadow seemed hardly to reach the earth before its body. It pounced upon the doctor's favorite kitten, which lay asleep on the grass, and made off with it.

"At an elevation of about fifty feet puss recovered from its surprise, and went to work for liberty. Its feline mind was exercised to astonishment and wrath. Twisting like a weasel, its claws came uppermost, and to my straining gaze a sight presented itself much like a feather bed being ripped open in mid-air.

"The amazed hawk received new light on the subject of prey, let go, and made off like a badly plucked goose, but the cat came safely to earth—on its feet."

DIDN'T KNOW THE "GREAT."

A few people at a hotel in London enjoyed a little telephonic exchange between the management of a theatrical company and the agent of a distinguished exponent of the noble art. The agent wanted privileges for his principal in the selection of a seat.

"Yes; who is the gentleman?" said the manager.

"Tommy Burns!" came the answer.

"Burns, did you say?"

"Yes, Burns—Tommy Burns."

"But who is he?"

"What, don't you know Tommy Burns?"

"Who is the gentleman?"

"Why, Tommy Burns, the pugilist, ex-champion of the world—the man who fought Johnson?"

"Johnson? Who is Johnson?"

There was silence at the other end for a moment; then came the query, slowly and emphatically:

"I say, you—did you ever hear of Napoleon?"

LET THE BELLS GO.

It was a proud moment for Farmer Giles when he went to see his sailor son on board the ship. He had never seen a vessel so close before, and he marveled at her size. Just as he caught hold of the two ropes which hung over the side to assist the sailors in clambering on deck, he heard "eight bells" go. As he stepped on deck he met the officer on watch. He saluted him, and said timidly: "Beg pardin', sur, but I didn't mean to ring so loud."

THE DOG NOT PARTICULAR.

First Tramp: "It's no good calling at that there house. Them people's wegetarians."

Second Tramp: "That so?"

First Tramp: "Yes; and they've got a dorg wot ain't."

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